HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

# The Thomist Tradition

Brian J. Shanley, O.P.

Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V.

HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Volume 2

*Series Editor*
EUGENE THOMAS LONG

*A list of titles in this series can be found at the end of this volume.*

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*To My Parents,*
*Joseph and Elaine Shanley*

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# Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion Series Outline

At mid-century western philosophy of religion appeared to be gasping for breath. The logical positivists and the positivists of revelation cooperated in challenging the legitimacy of natural theology and the philosophy of religion. Soon after mid-century, however, new approaches to philosophy with roots in the early twentieth century began to flourish leading to renewed interest in the philosophy of religion. Neo-Thomists and process philosophers breathed new life into metaphysics, and analytic and existential philosophers opened up new avenues for philosophical reflection on the meaning and truth of God-talk. These discussions often reflected an empirical and historical mindedness that was quietly calling into question the classical foundations of western philosophy and philosophy of religion. The last quarter of the century has seen the blossoming of this empirical and historical mindedness leading to an enormous change of climate in philosophical reflection on religion. This is an era characterized by pluralism in human experience and diversity in philosophical method. It is an era in which many of the traditional foundations and methods of philosophical reflection on religion are being called into question. The *Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* explores developments in contemporary philosophy of religion in its many forms. Volume one provides an historical map of twentieth century western philosophy of religion and serves as an introduction to other volumes in the *Handbook*. Among the early volumes will come studies of contemporary Thomistic, analytic, comparative and process philosophy of religion. Additional volumes are being planned covering other philosophical approaches and selected issues. Each volume will introduce the subject in its recent and current state and provide an analysis in light of contemporary debates and the author's own position.

Eugene Thomas Long
*Editor*

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The more proximate context of this book is the very same Dominican life that originally sustained and nurtured Thomas Aquinas. This book is an act of *pietas* for me, a chance to give back what I have received from a long line of Dominican students and teachers of Thomas Aquinas. I want to acknowledge especially the intellectual debts that I owe to Thomas C. O'Brien and William J. Hill, O.P.. It was from the late Thomas O'Brien, who received his intellectual formation in the Dominican life, that I learned how to read St. Thomas as a whole. It was from the teaching and example of William Hill that I learned how to read St. Thomas in dialogue with others. Those confreres whom I live with at the Dominican House of Studies have been a great support to me through our common endeavor to live the religious life that sustains and supports the study of divine truth. I am especially

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# Introduction

The Thomistic tradition takes it name from the thirteenth-century religious thinker and saint who is its source and inspiration: the Dominican Friar Thomas Aquinas.[1] Aquinas understood himself to be a theologian, and that is what he was. This obvious biographical fact needs to be underlined at the beginning, however, since it has often since been lost sight of in treatments of his thought.[2] The reason for this is that Aquinas also developed a powerful, innovative, and comprehensive philosophy which has proved to be at least as perennial, if not more so, than the theological synthesis that it was originally designed to serve. His followers have kept both strains of his thought alive until this day, but not always combining the same dual expertise. Theology and philosophy have since become more distinct, and as each has fragmented into sub-disciplines of academic specialization, it becomes harder and harder for anyone to master the thought of Aquinas as a whole. Yet grasping the whole is essential to grasping the part, as evidenced by the master work of Aquinas's mind: his *Summa theologiae*. You cannot understand any part of the *Summa* unless you understand its place within the whole, and much violence has been done to Aquinas's thought by abstracting it from the larger context in order to present it in discrete units.

For a Thomist who considers Aquinas in this way, as I do, a book such as this poses a number of problems. First, the set of topics currently considered to fall within the domain of the philosophy of religion does not map easily into the traditional Thomistic universe of discourse because it combines into one philosophical discipline what Thomists would want to separate into two formally distinct disciplines of theology and philosophy. To put the matter another way, contemporary philosophy of religion appears to the Thomist as something of a hybrid. Some of its standard topics and approaches are unproblematically philosophical by Thomist lights, but others seem to be formally theological.[3] The

[1] The best biography is Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C. : The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

[2] Notice the title of Thomas F. O'Meara's recent study: *Thomas Aquinas, Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). The very title signals O'Meara's intention to emphasize that the fundamental cast of Aquinas's thought is theological rather than philosophical.

[3] Chapter Two tries to explain how Thomists have traditionally understood the formal difference and inter-relationship of philosophy and theology, reason and faith.

template of this book and this series thus poses a problem for the Thomist because it blurs the formal boundaries between philosophy and theology. As much as possible, I have tried to stay on the philosophical side of the line, but often it has been necessary to bring theological issues into play in order to explicate the logic of the Thomistic position. I have endeavored throughout to make clear to the reader when the discussion crosses the line from philosophy into theology.

Because this book involves both philosophical and theological considerations, it would ideally require a Thomist author with broad competencies in both disciplines. My academic specialization is Thomistic philosophy, but as a Dominican friar I have also received extensive training in the theology of Aquinas; working in the field of philosophy of religion has enabled me to keep alive my interest in Thomistic theology. While this background does not make me the ideal person to write this book, it does make me conscious of how broad a range of knowledge would be necessary to write the perfect book of this kind. The virtue of having one person author a work like this is that it provides a unitary perspective and economy of consideration that would be lacking in a collection of separate essays by specialists in each field. The price paid for such unity is perhaps some unevenness of treatment, since no one person is equally competent in every area of the philosophy of religion, especially when it ranges over both philosophical and theological topics. I have tried to remedy my limitations through research and consultation. How well I have done that is for the reader to decide.

In the case of each of the topics considered in this book, I have endeavored to define the major issues under that rubric that have been debated within the Thomistic tradition. Given the holistic character of Aquinas's thought, a consideration of any one of the topics in the book leads naturally and inevitably into other topics. I have tried as much as possible to make each chapter able to stand on its own, but in the interests of economy I have also tried not to duplicate discussions; hence I often refer the reader in the footnotes to the other places in the book where the relevant cognate discussions can be found. Because the Thomistic tradition is not monolithic, as I outline in Chapter One, I have tried to give the reader a sense of the most important variant positions. My strategy is to begin wherever possible with the more traditional or classical position, as defined by its proximity to Aquinas's original view, and then use that as a baseline to explore more creative and contemporary interpretations of Aquinas. This means that there is quite a bit of consideration of the texts of Aquinas in this book,[4] which strikes me as inevitable and indeed desirable in a work on Thomism. Yet this is not a book on Aquinas, so I have not gone into the historical background to his views. I treat Aquinas as a participant in an ongoing philosophical dialogue, where his views can continue to be attractive in their original form or can become attractive through creative reinterpretation. I have tried to be fair-minded in cataloguing the various disagreements among Thomists. I do have views of my own, however, and they inform my treatments; the attentive reader will figure them out by the logic of my presentation and the critical questions that I raise. But I have tried to give an accurate and fair account of all the relevant schools of thought, even when I am not convinced of their cogency. I draw from sources both contemporary and classic,

[4] All the translations of Aquinas in this book are my own.

and from various languages; since the major audience of the book is English-speaking, there is naturally a preponderance of references to works in that language. My accounts of the various topics in this book provide an initial Thomistic orientation, not a final word, and I have endeavored to provide ample bibliographical information for the reader to pursue each topic further. I consider my task to be like that of the biblical scribe commended by Jesus for being like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. I believe there is some treasure for philosophers of religion in the Thomistic tradition, and I hope this book provides something of a map to it.

# Abbreviations of the Works of Aquinas

| | |
|---|---|
| CT | *Compendium of Theology* (Question, Article) |
| DA | *Disputed Questions on the Soul* or *De anima* (Question, Article) |
| DM | *Disputed Questions on Evil* or *De malo* (Question, Article) |
| DP | *Disputed Questions on Power* or *De potentia* (Question, Article) |
| DT | *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate* (Question, Article) |
| DV | *Disputed Questions on Truth* or *De veritate* (Question, Article) |
| QL | *Quodlibetal Questions* (Question, Article) |
| SCG | *Summa contra gentiles* (Book, Chapter) |
| Sent. | *Commentary on the Sentences* (Book, Distinction, Question, Article) |
| ST | *Summa theologiae* (Part, Question, Article) |

# 1. Twentieth-Century Thomisms

It generally happens that schools of thought following a great thinker end up riven by internal debates regarding what kind of adherence to the master is necessary for membership in the school. At one extreme stand those who believe in strict fidelity to the original thought as expressed in the canonical texts; in their conservative view, the main work of the school is exegesis, commentary, and defense against external criticism. At the other extreme stand those who believe that fidelity to the master entails adherence to a shared set of basic insights that must be creatively rethought and contextualized in the light of contemporary intellectual currents; in their progressive view, the main work of the school is *engagement*: dialogue with other views, internal self-criticism, and the formulation of answers to new questions from out of the tradition's resources. The two extremes tend to look suspiciously upon each other's projects. The conservatives tend to look upon any deviation from the original *philosophia perennis* as a kind of corruption: How dare the disciple purport to improve upon the original! The more creative disciples look upon the conservative project as intellectually stultifying, stagnant, and irrelevant. The conservative disciples generally do not want to be called "neo-" because they like to think they are faithful to the original, while the creative disciples usually want to be seen as somehow "neo-" in order to distinguish themselves from the strict disciples and to highlight their original contribution to the tradition. This tension can be seen in the histories of Platonism, Aristotelianism, Kantianism, Hegelianism, etc. It is certainly found within Thomism, especially in the twentieth-century.[1]

Twentieth-century Thomism is not monolithic but comprises instead various ways of perpetuating the thought of Aquinas. To understand the internal tension between conservative and progressive Thomisms it is necessary to go back to the founding moment of the Thomistic revival: Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. While a revival of medieval modes of thinking, commonly known as Neo-Scholasticism, pre-dates the encyclical, the issuance of the encyclical gave the movement an *imprimatur* and a powerful institutional backing (reiterated by Leo's successors) that would make it the dominant and normative strain in Roman

[1] For an overview of the history of Thomism prior to the twentieth-century, see O'Meara, 152-167.

Catholic thought up until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).[2] Leo's campaign to promote a restoration of Neo-Scholasticism within Catholic education was motivated by his conviction that post-Cartesian and especially Kantian philosophy was at the root of the major intellectual errors of the day, especially in theology. Leo's criticism of modern philosophy was not articulated in a syllabus-like listing of objectionable positions, but rather in the claim that the basic error vitiating modern philosophy was its repudiation of the tutelage of faith. Leo therefore argued that what was needed above all was a return to the practice of philosophizing in obedience to faith: "Those, therefore, who to the study of philosophy unite obedience to the Christian faith are philosophers indeed."[3] This mode of philosophizing in docility to Christian faith was the patrimony of the Church from the Fathers and the medieval Doctors; according to Leo, that long tradition had reached its climax in Thomas Aquinas, "the chief and master of all."

Leo's call for a return to Thomas Aquinas was an attempt to promote a way of thinking that had been consciously repudiated by modernity. Hence there was from the beginning an inherent tension between Thomism and modernity insofar as the former was seen as something of an antidote to the latter. The more conservative forms of Thomism were destined to be self-consciously and resolutely anti-modern, especially with respect to the modern starting point of subjectivity and its attendant epistemological problems. Many such Thomists were inclined to see modernity as a centuries-long dead end that should not be engaged but rather repudiated. It would be a mistake, however, to construe Leo's call for a return to Thomas as a naive attempt to turn back the intellectual clock. The encyclical acknowledges the great progress of modern science as a boon to humanity; there had been genuine advances in human knowledge. What Leo envisioned as the benefit of renewed Thomism was not simply a corrective to modernity's philosophical errors, but also an overarching integrative framework with respect to the advances in modern knowledge and culture. Leo hoped that a revived Thomism would be foundational and architectonic for all the other human disciplines. While philosophy was the master of all the human sciences, it was itself subservient to theology as the more-than-human science of the divine; hence Thomistic philosophy's architectonic and integrative activity would be within the context of a docility to Thomistic theology. Leo's vision of Thomism as integrative of all that was true in modern culture would provide the inspiration for the project of the progressive end of the Thomist spectrum: open engagement and dialogue with modern thought.

The narrative of twentieth-century Neo-Thomism, especially in its pre-Vatican II period, reflects the inherent ambivalence of the Leonine project between Thomism as corrective of modernity and as integrative of modernity. It is the tale of various construals of the kind of Thomism appropriate to the needs of the times:

[2] On the nineteenth-century background to *Aeterni Patris*, see Gerald McCool's *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989). See also *Christliche Philosophie in katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Band 2: *Rückgriff auf scholastiches Erbe*. Ed. Emerich Coreth, S.J., Walter Neidl, and Georg Pfligersdorffer (Vienna: Verlag Styria, 1988), 72-308.

[3] I am quoting the document as it appears in the appendix to the useful symposium *One Hundred Years of Thomism*, ed. Victor B. Brezik, C.S.B. (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981), 181.

from a return to the strict Thomism of the classical commentators like Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, to a return to Thomas himself in his thirteenth-century context as part of *ressourcement*, to the transcendental turn to the modern subject; all these versions of Thomism were thought to provide the appropriate resources for engaging the modern world. The purpose of this chapter is to give some kind of topology of these twentieth-century Thomisms. It is generally agreed that the Second Vatican Council marks a watershed in Thomism in the twentieth-century, and I shall divide my treatment accordingly. I shall devote more space to chronicling the pre-Vatican II period, however, for two reasons. First, because it stands at more of a distance from us at the dawn of a new century, and therefore I presume it is more likely that the reader will need some orientation. Second, because the more recent trends in Thomism are still works in progress and so do not easily admit of characterization. The aim of the pre-Vatican II overview is not to set out in detail the various doctrinal positions of the key figures; to the extent that their positions merit exposition in the context of this book, they will receive it in the appropriate chapters. The main concern in what follows is rather to give a sense of what makes for different versions of Thomism. What was the problematic being addressed? Who was being addressed? The overview is in no way meant to be exhaustive; there were more Thomists and Thomisms than will be mentioned here.[4] The criteria for inclusion involve a judgment about the historical importance of what is chronicled and its relevance to the concerns of this book.

## I. PRE-VATICAN II THOMISMS

### *A. Early French Dominican Thomism*

The newly reconstituted Dominican Order in France was responsible for some of the most important early work in the Thomist revival of the twentieth-century. In order to understand and appreciate early twentieth-century French Thomism of any type, however, it is necessary to see it as a response to the challenges to traditional Catholic theology and philosophy posed by Maurice Blondel and Henri Bergson.[5] Blondel, a devout Catholic, accepted the post-Kantian claim that religious faith could not be justified by an appeal to traditional metaphysics (proofs for the existence of God) or traditional apologetics (miracles). Like Schleiermacher, Blondel wanted to justify faith through an analysis of immanent consciousness. Blondel's project, most notably in *L'Action*, was to show that human consciousness manifests an inherent dynamism toward fulfillment in the

[4] The most exhaustive survey of Neo-Scholasticism in the twentieth-century is found in *Christliche Philosophie in katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Band 2: *Rückgriff auf scholastiches Erbe*, 310-858. The best-known studies in English of twentieth-century Neo-Thomism are by Gerald McCool, S.J.: *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989) and *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994). McCool's historical thesis and his interpretations of Gilson and Maritain have been subjected to some warranted criticism in *Thomistic Papers VI*, ed. John F. X. Knasas (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1994). For an overview of twentieth-century Thomisms from a more theological perspective, see O'Meara, 167-200.

[5] See McCool, "Blondel, Bergson, and the French Dominicans," in *The Neo-Thomists*, 43-74. See also Roger Aubert, *Le problème de l'acte de foi. Données traditionelles et résultats des controverses récentes*. Fourth edition. (Louvain: Presses Universitaire, 1969).

divine that is located not in the intellect, however, but in the will. Blondel believed that his analysis was superior to the traditional Neo-Scholastic approach because it appealed to the whole person, especially the will, in contrast to the overly rationalistic appeal of the standard approach. Henri Bergson, who was not a Catholic, was nonetheless enormously influential and attractive to his Catholic contemporaries (including such disparate characters as Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange) because he provided an alternative to the reigning philosophy of positivism. In contrast to the lifeless, inert, and mechanized view of reality espoused by the positivists, Bergson claimed that reality was characterized by a vital process of life and spirit known as *élan vital*. This deepest reality is opaque to the static conceptualizations of science and traditional philosophy, which therefore had only an instrumental value; the true nature of reality could only be grasped by an intuition. The cumulative effect of Blondel and Bergson was to call into question the traditional epistemological and metaphysical underpinnings of Catholic thought. Epistemologically, it challenged the primacy and value of intellectual/conceptual knowledge. Concepts did not seem adequate either to subjective experience or to the nature of vital reality itself. Theologically, this devaluation of concepts seemed to threaten the normative status of dogmatic formulations. Metaphysically, Bergson was perceived as especially threatening since he privileged becoming over being. Blondel posed a problem that would vex and divide Thomists throughout the twentieth-century: if one accepts the post-Kantian asumption that the metaphysical door to God is indeed shut, then is it possible to begin in subjectivity or immanence and indeed arrive at the living God?

Formulating responses to the currents set in motion by Blondel and Bergson would occupy French Thomists of varying persuasions for the first few decades of the century. Ambrose Gardeil, the founding figure of the great Dominican center of studies *Le Saulchoir*, set the tone for the Dominican response in arguing that a return to traditional Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology was the proper response to Bergsonianism. Against both the idealist denial and Bergsonian devaluation of conceptual knowledge, Gardeil defended its validity by a metaphysical analysis of knowledge as rooted in an immanent formal principle (the *species*) that gave access to extra-mental reality precisely because it had been formally caused by its object; there is a formal identity of knower and known in the act of knowledge that is based on the formal causality of the real. On the basis of abstraction, the mind is able to form a concept of being that can then serve as the basis for metaphysics. In the long debates that would ensue regarding the proper Thomistic response to the modern epistemological problematic, this strategy would be the backbone of the traditional response. Gardeil was not simply interested, however, in the vindication of Thomistic intellectual claims. He also wanted to demonstrate that Thomism was not a form of religious intellectualism. To that end he did important work in studying Aquinas's position on faith. Blondel's charge that traditional accounts of religious justification neglected the volitional or affective dimension of the human person was shown to have no bite against the authentic Thomistic account.[6] According to Aquinas, belief is the response of the

[6] The Thomistic account of faith will be considered in the next chapter.

whole person, intellect and will. The mind assents to the truth revealed by God, a truth it cannot fathom, precisely on the basis of the will's loving response to God as ultimate Good. Both these elements, intellect and will, can only come into contact with the living God under the influence of divine grace; there is no such thing as "natural" faith. Thus Gardeil proposed a return to traditional Thomistic metaphysics, epistemology, and doctrine of grace as the appropriate response to Blondel, Bergson, and indeed modernity in general.

Several other French Dominicans, like Roland-Gosselin and A.-D. Sertillanges, played an important part in the response to Blondel and Bergson. Yet in terms of the Thomist topology of this chapter, the more significant Thomist to emerge at this time was Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Garrigou-Lagrange is often disparagingly referred to by other Thomists as an expositor of "Strict-Observance Thomism" or even "Paleo-Thomism" because of his affinity for the classical Dominican commentators (Cajetan and John of St. Thomas) and his polemical attitude towards other interpretations of Thomas.[7] Garrigou-Lagrange made an early name for himself in the polemic against Bergson, but his most enduring work to emerge out of this early period was a full-scale defense of traditional natural theology in *Dieu: son existence, sa nature* (1914).[8] Garrigou-Lagrange's metaphysical approach presupposes the intellect's ability to grasp the concept of being through abstraction and then to articulate a science of being rigorously following the principle of non-contradiction, the principle of causality, and the Aristotelian division of being into potency and act. Upon this metaphysical and epistemological foundation, according to Garrigou-Lagrange, the traditional five arguments for the existence of God could be defended against all modern objections. Garrigou-Lagrange's massive commentaries on the *Summa theologiae* and his numerous treatises on spiritual theology made him one of the most influential of all Catholic authors in the pre-Vatican II period. His influence was not limited to his own work, since his long-standing prominence at the *Angelicum* (the Dominican pontifical university in Rome) led to such an extraordinary influence in the Vatican that his version of Thomism assumed a quasi-official status. By the time Garrigou-Lagrange attained such power, however, his version of Thomism had been called into question even by his own confrères. His style of Thomism would not stand up well against the new research into the historical Aquinas, and he came to be seen by some as a kind of Thomistic dinosaur. He was indeed the last of a dying breed: the grand Dominican commentators on Aquinas. There was great insight in Garrigou-LaGrange's work, and he is still a valuable source to consult as a kind of encyclopedia of the grand commentators. Yet the historical research that was going on contemporaneously to Garrigou-Lagrange's own commentaries would reveal a Thomas that did not always cohere with his commentators. The discrepancy between Thomas and his commentators (which should not be exaggerated) would lay bare the fact that the commentators themselves were interpreters of Thomas, Neo-Thomists if you will, who brought to bear their own presuppositions, prejudices, and problematics in their reading of

[7] See the chapter on "Garrigou-Lagrange and Strict-Observance Thomism" in Helen James John S.N.D., *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 3-15.

[8] The English translation is *God: His Existence and Nature*, trans. Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B. from the fifth French edition, Two Volumes (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1934-36).

Aquinas. It would therefore come to be believed that if Thomism was to reply to the problems of the day, it would have to be on the basis of an interpretation of St. Thomas's own original doctrines rather than on what had been handed down by the great commentators.

*B. Jacques Maritain*

Shortly after becoming a Roman Catholic, Jacques Maritain became a committed Thomist of the classical sort. His singular innovation with respect to the classical Dominican tradition, which elicited mostly strong disapproval from that quarter, was to assert that metaphysics was grounded in an "intuition" of being that arose as a spontaneous response to the initiative of reality itself.[9] This was clearly a nod in the Bergsonian direction, and Maritain consciously sought to integrate some of Bergson's insights into the Thomist framework. What distinguished Maritain from Bergson was that Maritain insisted that intuition gave insight into being as being and led to the formation of a concept of being much like that found in Garrigou-Lagrange; later in his career, as a result of the growing emphasis upon existence rather than essence as the central note of Thomistic metaphysics, Maritain would modify his conceptualism somewhat. Epistemologically, Maritain was resolutely anti-Cartesian and relied heavily on the work of John of St. Thomas in order to show the contrast between Thomism and modern idealism.[10]

What distinguished Maritain from other Thomists, and so made him one of the giants of the Thomistic revival, was the way in which he demonstated how a revitalized Thomism could unify and integrate contemporary culture (recall that this was one of the main aims of *Aeterni Patris*). *The Degrees of Knowledge*, for example, articulated a framework of an ordered hierarchy of the sciences whereby the mind ascends to ever-greater degrees of insight and unification from the philosophy of nature, to metaphysics, to the ultimate wisdom of theology. Maritain argued for the formal autonomy of philosophy from theology, but maintained also that as an intellectual habit in an individual human mind, philosophy needed the help of grace and revelation in order to avoid error and arrive at truth. Maritain's Thomistic engagement with contemporary culture went beyond the traditional domains of nature, epistemology, and metaphysics to encompass nearly every other major discipline as well, including morality, politics, and aesthetics. The breadth of Maritain's achievement was unparalleled among Thomists. He advocated and modeled a kind of living Thomism that drew from classical sources for the sake of confident engagement with modern culture. To many of his Thomist contemporaries, Maritain's work seemed the fulfillment of the promise of *Aeterni Patris*. His prodigious output and accessible style made him perhaps the most widely-read pre-Vatican II Thomist. Yet contemporaneous with Maritain's major works, new developments within Thomism called into question the classical Thomism that was foundational to his achievement.

[9] See *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 10-46.

[10] *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan (New York: Scribner's, 1959) is filled with footnote references to John of St. Thomas.

*C. The Recovery of the Historical Thomas*

One of the most important outcomes of *Aeterni Patris* was a tremendous upsurge of scholarly interest in the history of medieval philosophy. Catholic historians of medieval philosophy were especially interested to rebut the rationalist contention that there was no genuine philosophy during the medieval period but rather only some form of disguised theology. The first generation of great Catholic historians of medieval philosophy – Clemens Bäumker, Maurice De Wulf, and Etienne Gilson – went a long way toward dispelling the rationalist myth and rehabilitating the legitimacy of medieval philosophy *qua* genuine philosophy.[11] There were vigorous debates among these early historians about the nature of medieval philosophy. They argued about such issues as whether the unity of medieval philosophy was rooted in a doctrinal synthesis, a common patrimony, or a shared spirit; how it was related to theology; and what were the exact lineaments of its sources and schools. There was agreement, however, that genuine philosophy of the highest order had taken place in the period; it was not a philosophical dark age. These grand narratives of the history of medieval philosophy were aided by manuscript work producing new critical editions. The Dominican Order's ongoing project of producing the critical editions of the works of Thomas Aquinas is still known as the Leonine Commission because of its historical connection to Leo XIII and *Aeterni Patris*.

What is most significant in the context of this chapter is that the turn to historical-critical sources resulted in something of a different Thomas emerging from behind the Scholastic veil. It is facile and erroneous to dismiss the classical Thomistic commentators as corruptors of Aquinas, and there is much that can still be learned from them. Yet it is undeniable that that tradition constituted a kind of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the light of various problematics that eventually resulted in some distortion and occultation of the original. The recovery of the historical Thomas Aquinas, in the light of his own contemporary problematic, was something of a revelation and something of a subversion of traditional readings. What emerged was a more complex and original thinker than had hitherto been recognized. It would be the historical Thomas, not the Thomas of classical Thomism, that would provide the richest resource for Thomism.

Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P. was the leader in the recovery of the historical Thomas's theology. Chenu wrote historical studies on theology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which served as background for his magisterial introduction to Aquinas: *Introduction à l'étude de saint Thomas d'Aquin*.[12] The work of Chenu relocated Aquinas back in the cultural, historical, and intellectual world of the thirteenth-century. The ultimate aim of Chenu and his Dominican confrères at the Saulchoir was not a deeper understanding of the historical Thomas Aquinas for its

[11] For an overview of the course of medieval philosophy in the twentieth-century, see Timothy Noone's "Medieval Scholarship and Philosophy in the Last One Hundred Years" in *One Hundred Years of Philosophy*, ed. Brian J. Shanley, O.P., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999). For an appreciation of the early great historians of medieval philosophy by one of the next generation's greatest, see Fernand Van Steenburghen, *Introduction á l'étude de la philosophie médiévale* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1974), 55-77 and 283-332.

[12] (Montreal: Institut d'études médievales, 1950). Third edition, 1974. In English as *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, trans. and edited by A.M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Regnery Co. 1964).

own sake, but rather as a resource for contemporary theology (*ressourcement*). Chenu had little patience for a Thomism that would be tied to a dead past:

> Those who enclose themselves in a scholatic Thomism hardened by generations of textbooks and manuals (and marginalized by the intrusion of a massive dose of Baroque scholasticism) oblige themselves thereby to summary condemnations of positions of which they are largely ignorant. This would certainly not be the path for the disciples of Thomas Aquinas. And less helpful is the way of those who, with a strange collusion of anti-modernism, hand over the great memory of the medieval Doctor to a positivist intellectualism and keep for themselves a Thomism which is only a paragon of their own pseudo-religious integrist position. But this exploitation of Thomism (which some naively view to be salutary) cannot hide the real intentions of others, penetrated with the spirit of Thomas and with the high demands of scientific or theological work. They meet honestly the problems legitimately posed by the philosophy of religion, biblical exegesis, and the history of dogma. Illumined by the experience of their teacher they know how to discern in new terrain the relationships of reason and faith. Precisely this is the intellectual regime of Catholicism.[13]

In the wake of Chenu, numerous other historical studies of Aquinas broke new ground and provided new resources for contemporary theology. For example, Yves Congar, O.P. mined Thomas for important ecclesiological studies that would eventually have a major effect on the Second Vatican Council.[14] Dom Oddo Lottin, O.S.B. did pioneering research in thirteenth-century moral theology that led to a new appreciation of Aquinas and helped to revitalize Catholic moral theology.[15] Henri Brouillard, S.J.[16] and Henri De Lubac, S.J.[17] authored studies on Aquinas's doctrine of grace that would be foundational for the ferment known as *La Nouvelle Théologie*. Much of this story lies outside the scope of this work, but it is important nonetheless to see the way in which the recovery of the authentic theology of Aquinas served to revitalize Thomism.

On the philosophical side, the most important historical discoveries were in the area of metaphysics. Typically, as in the case of Garrigou-Lagrange, classical Thomistic metaphysics had come to place great stress on the primacy of the concept of being and so had come to contruct a systematic account of metaphysics that bore some of the marks of rationalism. To put the matter another way, classical Thomism's encounters with Scotism and rationalism had left their traces in a subtle skewing of the original insights of Aquinas. What now emerged as central and original to Thomas's own metaphysics is the primacy of *esse* (the Latin infinitive

[13] "Le sens et les leçons d'une crise religieuse," *La vie intellectuelle* 13 (1931): 380. The translation is that of O'Meara in *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian*, 182.

[14] For an accessible overview see Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Yves Congar* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989).

[15] *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*. 6 Vol.. (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1942-1960).

[16] *La conversion et la grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944).

[17] *Surnaturel: études historiques*. (Paris: Aubier, 1946).

form of "to be") understood as the basic act (*actus essendi*) of every being (*ens*); in Aquinas's metaphysics, being is understood as a perfection structure wherein some concrete subject (an *ens*) exercises a certain kind of *esse* through the formal or essential principle (*essentia*) that makes it be the kind of being that it is. Gilson, whose monumental contributions to twentieth-century Thomism will be considered in the next section, is generally given the lion's share of the credit for the recovery of *esse* as central to Aquinas's metaphysics. Yet that common picture is somewhat erroneous, for the recovery of Aquinas's authentic metaphysics was a cumulative and collaborative effort on the part of many scholars often acting independently from each other; such figures as Aimé Forest, André Marc, and Joseph de Finance all made significant contributions to the recovery of Aquinas's metaphysics.[18]

Towering above all Thomistic metaphysicians, and providing a much needed corrective to Gilson, was Cornelio Fabro. Like Gilson, Fabro emhasized the primacy of *esse* in Aquinas's metaphysics. But at least early on, Gilson had something of a blind spot when it came to the way in which Aquinas's understanding of *esse* and its role in his metaphysics was influenced by the Neoplatonic idea of participation. The recognition of the Neoplatonic elements in Aquinas was one of the most important aspects of the historical recovery. Hitherto, Aquinas had been read against an overly Aristotelian background that obscured both his Neoplatonic background and his originality. Fabro was the first to identify and outline the role of participation in his landmark *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secundo S. Tomaso d'Aquino* (1939).[19] Fabro showed that at the heart of Aquinas's understanding of the one and the many, especially as that problem gets worked out at the level of the relationship between God and the world, is that the many get their metaphysical value by somehow sharing, in a limited and causally derivative fashion, a perfection that belongs by nature to the One who is its source. Fabro would subsequently articulate this theme in numerous articles and another important monograph.[20] Fabro's discovery of participation as a leitmotif in Aquinas was paralleled by an independent and roughly contemporaneous study by Louis B. Geiger, O.P.[21] Geiger and Fabro differ on some key points of interpretation,[22] but together their work opened up an important and hitherto neglected element in Aquinas's thought. The Neoplatonic elements of Aquinas's thought continue to be the subject of scholarly research. The central metaphysical doctrines of *esse* and participation will figure significantly at some key points in the discussions to follow.

[18] For an overview of the various figures, see Helen James John, *A Thomist Spectrum*.

[19] Third edition, (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1963).

[20] *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1961).

[21] *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1942).

[22] See John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Participation," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 117-158. See also the same author's *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 94-131. This is the definitive study of Aquinas's metaphysics.

*D. Etienne Gilson*[23]

Etienne Gilson was uniquely suited to rehabilitate the legitimacy of medieval philosophy against the rationalist claim that the pre-Cartesian period was a philosophical wasteland because he backed his way into it from the study of modern philosophy. Gilson began his academic career studying the medieval background to Descartes, and what he discovered was a heavy reliance by Descartes upon a set of philosophical presuppositions that were the unique patrimony of medieval thought; in other words, Gilson's research showed that Descartes's own original work presupposed certain key philosophical concepts that were in no way attributable to Greek thought. Thus there had been genuine philosophy during the medieval period after all! The attempt to re-think the legacy of Greek thought within the context of Christian revelation had resulted in profound and pluriform philosophical advances, especially in the area of metaphysics. Far from being the bane of philosophy, theology had instead proven to be a boon. This "discovery" of medieval philosophy led Gilson to shift his attention away from Descartes to medieval philosophy, and he applied to the study of medieval philosophy the same historical methods that he had previously applied to Descartes. The prodigious scholary output that followed would make Gilson the most prolific and influential historian of medieval philosophy in the twentieth century.

What was distinctive and controversial about Gilson's approach to medieval philosophy in general and Thomas Aquinas in particular was his conception of *Christian* philosophy.[24] To Gilson's critics, both inside and outside Catholic circles, the very idea of Christian philosophy was a contradiction in terms; in Heidegger's famous judgment, it was as absurd as a squared circle.[25] The best way to get at Gilson's claim is not by a formal analysis of terms, however, but rather through his examination of the actual history of medieval philosophy. The historical reality, as laid out most perspicuously in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*,[26] was that medieval philosophy owed its originality and depth to its theological context. The exigencies of Christian theology had suggested new philosophical topics and guided philosophical investigation to the achievement of new insights; *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* is something of a catalogue of this phenomenon. Gilson there defined Christian philosophy: "Thus I call Christian, every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nonetheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to

[23] On the life and works of Gilson, see Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson*, The Etienne Gilson Series 6 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeveal Studies, 1984).

[24] See "What is Christian Philosophy?" in *A Gilson Reader*, ed. A.C. Pegis (New York: Hannover House, 1957), 177-191. See also the "Translator's Introduction" to *Christian Philosophy*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1993), *ix-xxv*, and John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy," in his *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 1-33. The topic of Christian philosophy will get more extensive treatment in the next chapter.

[25] *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 6.

[26] These Gifford lectures were originally published in 1932 as *L'esprit de la philosophie médievale*, 2 Vol. (Paris: J. Vrin). The English translation has been reprinted by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1991.

reason."[27] Christian philosophy was emphatically not a hybrid of philosophy and theology, since it did not formally rely upon revelation for its premises and argumentation; it was genuine philosophy insofar as it excluded appeals to revelation and recognized an internal reliance upon rational argumentation alone. What made it "Christian" was that its deepest insights were occasioned by philosophical reflection at the service of theology. The best medieval philosophy was worked out by theologians attempting to articulate a philosophy that could serve as a vehicle for theology. Christian theology opened up new philosophical insights and ruled out certain philosophical positions. Gilson argued that the unity of medieval philosophy *qua* Christian philosophy was not in some kind of doctrinal unity, since it was manifest that there had been genuine and irreducible philosophical plurality among medieval thinkers, but rather in a common spirit of pursuing philosophical thinking in the service of theology. Gilson developed his reading of medieval philosophy long before he was familiar with Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*. Once he studied *Aeterni Patris*, however, he roundly endorsed its program because he interpreted it as advocating a position very much like his own.[28]

Gilson considered the work of Thomas Aquinas to be the summit and paradigm of medieval philosophy *qua* Christian philosophy. He therefore insisted that Aquinas be treated as a Christian philosopher.[29] Gilson consistently maintained that because Aquinas was fundamentally a theologian rather than a philosopher, his philosophical achievement could only be understood within its original theological context. Aquinas wrote no *Summa philosophiae*, but rather his major works are two theological *summae*: *Summa contra gentiles* and *Summa theologiae*. Because Aquinas's deepest philosophical insights are embedded in his theological works, Gilson insisted that Thomistic philosophy always be presented according to an explicitly theological order that begins with God and then moves to creatures. He acknowledged that Aquinas had endorsed a formal procedure for philosophy that would begin with creatures and eventually culminate in God, but he stressed that Aquinas never produced a systematic work of his own displaying such a philosophical order. Since Aquinas never articulated a philosophy independent of theology, any attempt to present his thought as if he had would be a distortion. There was more at stake in Gilson's position than simple fidelity to Aquinas's own procedure; Gilson endorsed the thesis of *Aeterni patris* that the separation of philosophy from theology lay at the bottom of the decline of philosophy in modernity. Gilson therefore judged illegitimate the classical Thomist claim that it was possible to reconstruct a genuine Thomistic philosophy that would follow a formally philosophical order. Many of his fellow Thomists sharply disagreed.[30]

[27] *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 37.

[28] See *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. Cécile Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), 175-199. See also Armand Maurer, "Gilson and *Aeterni Patris*," in *Thomistic Papers VI*, 91-105.

[29] For a definitive statement of his reading, see Gilson's "Introduction" to *Le thomisme*, Sixth edition (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997), 9-45.

[30] A classic Thomistic critique of Gilson's approach to Aquinas's metaphysics can be found in Thomas C. O'Brien, *Metaphysics and the Existence of God* (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1960).

Following the theological order, Gilson began all his treatments of Aquinas with a consideration of God. Gilson held that the doctrine of God was the key to Aquinas's philosophy because it was the key to his authentic metaphysics. For Gilson, Aquinas's doctrine of God was the paradigm case of revelation's influence upon philosophy. Gilson held that Aquinas's foundational identification of God with the infinite act of existence (*esse*) was a result of his meditation upon the self-revelation of God in *Exodus* 3:14 as *Qui est* or "Who is." Aquinas's metaphysical interpretation of this revealed name was that existence (*esse*) was identical with the very nature or essence of God. From this truth about God, it follows then that every other being is characterized by a real distinction between what it is (as determined by its essence) and the act whereby it exists (*esse*). The primacy of the act of existence in Aquinas, the doctrine which sets him apart from both Aristotle and Augustine because it accords primacy to *esse* as metaphysically more basic than form or essence, is a genuine philosophical insight (Gilson did not think that God had revealed the Thomistic doctrine of *esse*), but it nevertheless depends upon revelation for its genesis. Gilson believed that the recovery of Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse* was central to the contemporary viability of Thomism. In Gilson's narrative of the history of Western metaphysics, seen most clearly in *Being and Some Philosophers*,[31] Aquinas's doctrine of *esse* represented a signal breakthrough against the previous tradition's privileging of form or essence as the fundamental feature of reality. The subsequent history of metaphysics has demonstrated that Aquinas's insight into *esse* is easily occluded by the perennial tendency to return to the primacy of essence. As Gilson read the history of Neo-Scholasticism, even most so-called Thomists had betrayed their master's heritage by unwittingly proferring some form of essentialism; historically, Cajetan and Suarez were the major offenders in this regard. Gilson's critique thus called into question the metaphysical legitimacy of certain other forms of Thomism prevalent in his own day (e.g. Garrigou-Lagrange).

If Gilson's reading of Aquinas generated some vigorous intramural debate among Thomists about metaphysics and medieval philosophy, he shared the general Thomistic anti-modern attitude toward the epistemological turn to the subject.[32] Garrigou-Lagrange, Maritain, and Gilson were all in agreement that Thomistic realism entailed an absolute repudiation of the modern starting point of immanent consciousness; there could be no compromise with modernity on this point. Any epistemology that began in subjectivity was doomed to end up as some form of idealism. This was an area where there could be no dialogue with modernity but only divorce. Yet while this was the majority view, it was by no means the unanimous opinion of Thomists. Indeed, some believed that the very viability of Thomism depended upon embracing the modern starting point and showing how it is possible to break out of its idealistic impasse to arrive at a metaphysics that was recognizably Thomistic.

[31] Second Edition, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952).

[32] *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1939). In English: *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

*E. Transcendental Thomism and the Dialogue with Modernity*

Among the pre-eminent centers of Thomism to emerge as a result of *Aeterni Patris* was the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Louvain under the leadership of Désiré Mercier. Louvain would prove to be a place where both important medieval scholarship and a serious dialogue with modernity would flourish. The origin of the most influential and ambitious attempt at Thomistic dialogue with modernity began at Louvain with the Belgian Jesuit Joseph Maréchal. A contemporary of the French Jesuit Pierre Rousselot, whose tragic early death left behind a brilliant legacy in a recovery of Aquinas's religious epistemology,[33] Maréchal is considered to be the father of a movement that would become known as Transcendental Thomism.[34] What gave Transcendental Thomism its family resemblance was the shared conviction that the contemporary relevance of Thomism required it to accept the modern turn to the subject as its starting point. The transcendental task was to show how one could begin with the immanent realm of subjectivity and still conclude to some form of epistemological and metaphysical realism that could lay claim to continuity with Aquinas. The key to all the varying strategies was some form of a transcendental argument that begins with an analysis of subjectivity which argues that the a priori conditions for the very possibility of human knowing and willing require the postulation of metaphysical conclusions akin to those of Aquinas. In each version of Transcendental Thomism, the central a priori feature of human subjectivity is disclosed as some form of spiritual dynamism towards the Absolute that not only philosophically requires a realistic metaphysics but moreover could serve the overarching theological purpose of showing how Christian claims answer to the deepest dynamic dimensions of human subjectivity as transcendentally conceived. In other words, the Transcendental Thomist project endeavored to show that the modern subject is not a self-enclosed autonomous absolute but rather a dynamic openness to the Absolute Self. It is important to keep in mind that Transcendental Thomism's theological agenda is enormously influential in setting its philosophical agenda; transcendental anthropology is at the service of transcendental theology.

Maréchal's innovation was the claim that *pace* Kant a genuine critical philosophy faithful to its own methodology resulted in the justification of Thomistic metaphysical claims.[35] Maréchal's attempt to get beyond the metaphysical limits of the Kantian critique hearkened back to Fichte in its reliance upon an appeal to the inherent dynamism of the human mind. Maréchal's transcendental analysis focused on the mind's act of judgment, the assertion that some *S is P*, as requiring the postulation of some kind of dynamism toward the Absolute. Maréchal accepted the Kantian claim that there is no intellectual intuition and that all knowledge presupposes both sensible intuition and concept

[33] For more on Rousselot, see McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism*, 39-86.

[34] For an overview of the Transcendental Thomist project, see Otto Muck's entry in *Christliche Philosophie*, 590-622 and his earlier *The Transcendental Method*, trans. William D. Seidensticker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). For overviews by Thomists critical of the project, see William J. Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), 59-88, and E.L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 59-90.

[35] A nice introduction to Maréchal can be found in Joseph Donceel, S.J., *A Maréchal Reader* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

formation. But he argued that when the mind objectified its contents in judgment, it did so against the implicit horizon of the Absolute; all finite judgments require some kind of infinite backdrop as an a priori condition. The a priori backdrop of the unconditioned Absolute is not a Kantian Idea but rather a genuine contact with a trans-subjective Absolute. It is important to note that this contact with the Absolute is neither conceptual nor even purely intellectual; it is rather a kind of projection that is rooted in the finality of the intellect and intimately (and somewhat problematically) connected with a conative dynamism in the will.

The German Jesuit Karl Rahner was much influenced by Maréchal, but his project was ultimately more ambitious and eventually became the dominant version of Transcendental Thomism.[36] Rahner went beyond Maréchal in dialoguing with a broader range of post-Kantian philosophy, most notably Hegel and Heidegger. His first major work, *Spirit in the World*, was an extended commentary on the problem of the role of the phantasm in human knowledge in *Summa theologiae* I, 84,7.[37] Rahner wanted to show how Aquinas's analysis of human intellection is inextricably grounded in the horizon of sensibility (hence the ongoing need for the phantasm) yet somehow comes to itself in transcending that horizon in the intellectual act of judgment. Judgment always involves an implicit pre-conceptual grasp (*Vorgriff*) of Infinite *Esse*. The human being is an incarnated spirit with an a priori dynamism toward the Absolute; all human knowing and loving has God as its implicit horizon. This philosophical anthropology would provide a powerful basis for Rahner's influential theological project of showing how Christianity coheres with transcendental anthropology. This claim will get a fuller articulation later in this work.[38] It is worthy of note here, however, that from the beginning Rahner's reading of Aquinas was controversial enough that *Spirit in the World* was rejected by his doctoral director at the University of Freiburg (Martin Honecker) as an acceptable interpretation of Aquinas.

The other great transcendental project was that of the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan.[39] Lonergan cut his teeth on Aquinas and his first two major works were extended studies of some central and fiercely contested issues in Thomism. The first work, his doctoral dissertation at the Gregorianum eventually published as *Grace and Freedom*,[40] is a brilliant study of the hoary problem of the relationship between divine grace and human freedom. Lonergan's work cut through the Baroque controversies resulting from post-Reformation intramural Catholic debates about grace originating in the circa-1600 *De auxillis* controversey to

[36] A good introduction to Rahner is Gerald A. McCool, *A Rahner Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1975).

[37] Second German edition of *Geist in Welt* translated by W. Dych, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

[38] See the discussion of Rahner's anthropology in Chapter Seven.

[39] The most reliable expositor of Lonergan is Frederick E. Crowe, S.J.. See his *Lonergan* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) and his collected essays, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989). On Lonergan's relationship to Aquinas, see especially the essay in the latter entitled "The Origin and Scope of Bernard Lonergan's *Insight*," 13-30. On Lonergan's philosophy, see Hugh Meynall, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Bernard Lonergan*, Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronoto Press, 1991).

[40] Recently republished as *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Collected Works of Lonergan 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

provide a fresh and persuasive reading of Aquinas. The second work, which originally appeared as a series of articles in *Theological Studies* and later was published in book form as *Verbum*,[41] was a complicated and original interpretation of Aquinas's theory of cognition. Having thus steeped himself in Aquinas's mind, Lonergan then sought to articulate a personal appropriation of Aquinas in dialogue with contemporary thought. The result was *Insight*,[42] which Lonergan believed was fundamentally faithful to Aquinas's epistemology and metaphysics even though his approach to those topics relied upon a transcendental methodology and eschewed traditional language. Lonergan's mature thought defies summary in a context such as this because of its originality and transmutation of traditional Thomistic concepts; hence no outline will be attempted here. Suffice it to say that Lonergan hoped to appeal to the modern mind by accepting the primacy of the question of method. Lonergan's transcendental goal was to lay bare the a priori methodological features of all human thinking, especially science and philosophy. Lonergan wanted to display what was presupposed in understanding-in-general as the methodological key to what it meant to understand any particular subject matter. Lonergan hoped to articulate a transcendental methodology that would validate both the advances in modern thought (especially the sciences) and the traditional claims of Thomistic epistemology and metaphysics (once freed from their onerous connection to antiquated scientific claims). Having worked through the transcendental problem of method, Lonergan would later go on to apply his findings to theology in *Method in Theology*.[43]

The general transcendental project met with widespread criticism from traditional Thomists like Gilson, who argued not only that it was fundamentally unfaithful to Aquinas, but also that it was internally incoherent: if you start where Kant starts, you end where he ends. Yet not all such worries were evidence of an anti-modern attitude. If transcendental philosophy seemed fundamentally opposed to basic Thomistic principles, perhaps then another dialogue partner needed to be chosen. Such was the view of the Belgian Dominican De Petter, O.P., who sought instead to re-think Aquinas in the light of a phenomenological analysis of consciousness.[44] DePetter shared with the transcendentalists both a dissatisfaction with traditional articulations of Thomistic realism as overly conceptual or representationalist, and a corresponding desire to validate religious epistemology in some kind of non-conceptual dynamism towards the Absolute. DePetter wanted to locate that dynamism in objective reality, however, rather in transcendental subjectivity. DePetter held that there was an implicit non-conceptual intuition of the infinite based on an objective dynamism in the real toward the ground of its own being. The key contrast with Transcendental Thomism was that DePetter thought that the mind read off the dynamism from the real or objective order rather than projecting it onto the real on the basis of a subjective dynamism. Conceptual

[41] Ed. by David B. Burrell (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967).

[42] (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957). Revised Student's edition (New York: Herder and Herder, 1978)

[43] (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

[44] For more on DePetter's position, see the discussion in Philip Kennedy, O.P., *Deus Humanissimus: The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1993), 97-99.

knowledge presupposes the objective dynamism and cognitively points us in the right direction of the Infinite, though it can never adequately encompass it. DePetter's famous pupil, Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., believed that DePetter's claim provided the key to resolving one of the most contentious theological problems of the first half of the twentieth-century: the relationship between between religious experience and conceptual knowledge.[45] Schillebeeckx would appropriate DePetter's philosophy in the service of a religious epistemology that tried to keep experience and conceptual knowledge together in an organic unity that allowed for both the validity and the limitations of the conceptual vis-à-vis the divine.[46]

## II. THOMISMS AFTER VATICAN II

It is generally agreed that the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) marked a watershed moment in the history of Thomism. What happened at the Council was not that Thomism lost its official sanction within Roman Catholicism. Indeed, Thomas still continues to be proposed by the papal magisterium as "a master of thought and a model of the right way of doing theology," as Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.[47] The pope goes on to say:

> It should be clear in the light of these reflections why the Magisterium has repeatedly acclaimed the merits of Saint Thomas's thought and made him the guide and model for theological studies. This has not been in order to take a position on properly philosophical questions nor to demand adherence to particular theses. The Magisterium's intention has always been to show how Saint Thomas is an authentic model for all who seek the truth. In his thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by Revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason.[48]

Thomas is thus still considered to be the model of the original Leonine ideal of the integration of faith and reason. But the pre-eminence of Thomas as a model does not mean that Thomism is normative or binding in a doctrinal sense. As the encyclical states clearly: "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others."[49] What matters is not dogmatic adherence to Thomism, but rather adherence to the integrative ideal of Thomism with respect to faith and reason. Hence the encyclical endorses the kind of philosophical and theological pluralism that has marked Roman Catholic thinking since the Second Vatican Council.

[45] In addition to the work cited in the previous note, see also Philip Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, ed. Robert Schreiter (New York: Crossroad, 1984), and *The Praxis of Christian Experience*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter and Mary Catherine Hilkert (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

[46] This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

[47] *On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason* (Washington, D.C.: The United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 66.

[48] Ibid., 114-115.

[49] Ibid., 75.

Even before the Second Vatican Council, however, the winds of change were blowing against the privileged theological place of Thomism in favor of a theology whose sources were more broad-based, especially in Scripture but also in Patrology, and whose framework offered more opportunities for dialogue with contemporary culture (e.g. *La nouvelle théologie*). The theological move away from Thomism was modeled by the most important Catholic theologians to emerge at the Council, who themselves had earlier been proponents of more "open" versions of Thomism. Karl Rahner, who became the most influential Catholic theologian after the Council, openly embraced theological and philosophical pluralism.[50] It is arguable that his own theology was already moving in a direction away from its earlier Neo-Thomistic foundations. Lonergan's writings seemed also to move away from any conscious espousal of Neo-Thomism. Schillebeeckx's post-Vatican II theology has undergone several permutations as a result of his reading of contemporary philosophy. This is not to say that these theologians did not remain profoundly marked by and in some sense still indebted to Aquinas, but that their committments to Aquinas were at a foundational dimension not always evident to their students. The next generation of Catholic theologians would take Rahner especially for their guide, but often without an appreciation for his philosophical grounding in Neo-Thomism. In general, Neo-Thomism's influence in the domain of speculative or dogmatic theology has been on the wane since Vatican II in Roman Catholic circles.[51]

It has been a different story, however, in philosophy, where Aquinas's thought has remained vibrant within Catholicism and gained a considerable following in the non-Catholic philosophical world. Within Catholic circles, the classical Neo-Scholastic Thomism of the great commentator style has gone into eclipse. And Transcendental Thomism is no longer a vigorous movement, due to its theological decline and its failure to gain many adherents outside of theology. Yet several of the pre-Vatican II movements within Neo-Thomism have retained their vibrancy.[52] Maritain's influence has waned somewhat, but the Jacques Maritain Center at Notre Dame and the Maritain Association continue to promote his work. The Gilsonian school has maintained a strong North American presence due to the influence of the Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies in Toronto in educating teachers of medieval philosophy and Thomas Aquinas. Several of Gilson's pupils, most notably Joseph Owens and Armand Maurer, have vigorously defended and advanced their teacher's approach. Undoubtedly, the most viable pre-Vatican II trend has proved to be research into the historical Thomas. Each year important monographs and articles continue to pour forth from all corners of the globe.

The most important new trend to emerge in Thomism since the Council has been the increased interest in Aquinas among philosophers trained in the analytic

[50] On Rahner's later relationship to Aquinas, see Gerald McCool, S.J., "Karl Rahner and the Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," in *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner, S.J.*, ed. William J. Kelly, S.J. (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 1980), 63-93. See also the accompanying responses by Robert Kress, 94-101, and Patrick J. Burns, S.J., 101-104.

[51] An outstanding exception to this has been the work of William J. Hill, O.P.. See his *Three-Personed God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982) and *Search for the Absent God*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

[52] See Gerald A. McCool, S.J. "The Tradition of Saint Thomas in North America: At 50 Years," *The Modern Schoolman* 65 (1988): 185-206.

tradition. Several well-known analyical philosophers have been especially influential in modeling and promoting such treatments.[53] The pioneer in this regard has been Peter Geach, the first imporant analytic philosopher to bring Aquinas into the contemporary analytical conversation; his essay on Aquinas in *Three Philosophers*[54] has proven to be seminal to subsequent analytic treatments. Although often critical, Anthony Kenny's long-standing interest in Aquinas has also helped to generate and validate analytic interest.[55] More recently, the work of Alasdair MacIntyre in moral philosophy has been especially influential in generating interest in Aquinas's moral thought and in MacIntyre's own version of Thomism.[56] Two more recent trends in analytic philosophy have been vital to renewed interest in Aquinas. The first has been the emergence of analytically-influenced treatments of the history of medieval philosophy, as evidenced in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*.[57] Medieval philosophy in the English-speaking world is no longer a predominantly Catholic enterprise interested in extracting a *philosophia perennis* and suspected of harboring ideological biases; along with Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy has been become fertile territory for analytic consideration. The second important trend has been the emergence of the philosophy of religion as a recognized area of analytic concentration. Aquinas has become a seminal philosophical source for many analytic philosophers interested in topics associated with the philosophy of religion; the work of Brian Davies, Norman Kretzmann, and Eleonore Stump and others has been especially influential in generating contemporary interest in Aquinas.

The level of interest in Aquinas among analytic philosophers is today serious enough to have generated talk of "Analytical Thomism" as a kind of school of thought. The most notable proponent of this movement is John Haldane. In his "Introduction" to a volume of *The Monist* devoted to Analytical Thomism, Haldane describes the goal of the enterprise as "to deploy the methods and ideas of twentieth-century philosophy – of the sort dominant in the English-speaking world – in connection with the broad framework of ideas introduced and developed by Aquinas."[58] As Haldane notes in another place, however, most Thomists have long been suspicious of analytic philosophy as inherently anti-theistic because of its

[53] While I am emphasizing the significance of analytic appropriations of Aquinas, it most also be noted that there was significant work in the philosophy of religion in Great Britain done by non-analytic thinkers influenced by the thought of Aquinas. Two figures, both Gifford Lecturers, are worthy of note. The first, referenced in an earlier note, is the Anglican divine E.L. Mascall, whose *The Openness of Being* bears as its subtitle: *Natural Theology Today*. The second, the Jesuit Frederick Copleston, authored *Religion and the One: Philosophies East and West* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), along with numerous other titles in the history of philosophy and the philosophy of religion.

[54] In G. E. M. Anscombe and P.T Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), 67-125.

[55] *Aquinas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980). *The Five Ways. St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980). *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[56] See John Haldane, "MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?" in *After MacIntyre*, ed. J. Horton and S. Mendus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), and Kent Reames, "MacIntyre's Thomism," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 419-443.

[57] Ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[58] *The Monist* 80 (1997): 486.

early association with Logical Positivism.[59] Yet such suspicion these days betrays ignorance of the actual state of analytic philosophy as a pluralistic approach to philosophy without any necessary dogmatic allegiance to anti-metaphysical, anti-realist, or anti-theistic claims. Contemporary analytic philosophy of religion has shown that analytic tools can advance theistic claims as well as anti-theistic claims. Hence Haldane argues that the vitality of Thomism in the English-speaking philosophical world depends upon its engagement with analytic philosophy. Otherwise, Thomism risks intellectual stagnation, isolation, and deterioration. Haldane argues that Thomism has much to offer contemporary analytic philosophy by way of needed corrective to its inherent deficiencies: e.g. a lack of historical sense and a loss of the sense of wisdom as the unifying *telos* of philosophy. Constructive engagement between Thomism and analytic philosophy thus provides hope for amelioration of both traditions.

Like all other innovations within the tradition, Analytic Thomism has its critics among adherents of other versions of Thomism. For many Thomists, any movement that purports to synthesize Thomism with some foreign philosophical approach will end up betraying Thomism; there can be no such thing as "_____-Thomism," whether the blank be filled in by "Analytical," "Trancendentental," or "Phenomenological" because any such marriage will undermine Thomism. Stephen Theron has argued, for example, that analytic treatments of Aquinas, such as those found in Geach and Kenny, tend to misconstrue his basic metaphysical and epistemological positions because they interpret Aquinas according to analytic dogmas at odds with his original thought.[60] Specifically, Theron asserts that Geach's metaphysical committment to Frege leads him to downplay the role of existence in Aquinas and so make him into an essentialist; on the epistemological side, Theron claims that Geach compromises Aquinas's realism by giving too great a role to the spontaneity of the intellect in concept formation. While I am sympathetic to Theron's metaphysical and epistemological worries,[61] I believe he goes too far in disparaging the prospects for fruitful interchange between Thomists and philosophers trained in the Analytic tradition. Haldane is right that Thomism risks stagnation and isolation in the English-speaking world if it does not learn to dialogue with analytic philosophers. If Thomism is to continue to pass itself off as a *philosophia perennis*, then it must vindicate that claim through dialogue with other philosophical traditions in the way that Alasdair MacIntyre has argued. As every Thomist would agree, if Aquinas were alive in the contemporary North American intellectual world, he would engage analytic philosophy just as he engaged contemporary Aristotelianism in his own day. This kind of engagement need not and must not involve jettisoning the central metaphysical and epistemological claims of Thomism, yet it would involve learning how to make those claims in a new language or idiom. As Bonnie Kent has argued in response to Haldane, the task of Analytic Thomism is not to facilitate it assimilation into

[59] "Thomism and the Future of Catholic Philosophy," *New Blackfriars* 80 (1999), 168. The rest of the volume is devoted to various responses to Haldane's paper and so constitutes an invaluable resource for understanding both the prospects and the possible pitfalls of Analytical Thomism.

[60] "The Resistance of Thomism to Analytical and Other Patronage" *The Monist* 80 (1997): 611-618.

[61] See my "Analytical Thomism," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 125-137.

analytic philosophy, but rather to learn how to translate and test Thomistic claims in the language and idiom of that philosophy.[62]

What emerges from this brief survey of twentieth-century Thomisms is that the tradition has always been marked by the tension between conservation and innovation, between doctrinal fidelity and dialogue. This has been true throughout the entire history of Thomism, and it will continue to be true in the new century. How could it otherwise? A Thomism that stayed in a defensive intellectual ghetto would cease to be a living tradition, while a Thomism that accommodated itself to every new philosophical movement would cease to be Thomism. Each age demands both a genuine fidelity to the original and a genuine willingness to dialogue with what is new in philosophy. Not every Thomist will engage in both tasks, but all must at least recognize the need for both in the enterprise of making Thomism a living tradition.

[62] *New Blackfriars* 80 (1999): 185-188.

# 2. Religious Knowledge: The Relationship between Faith and Reason

In a well-known passage of the *Summa contra gentiles*, Thomas Aquinas asserts that our knowledge of God comprises two kinds of truths: "There are some truths about God which completely surpass the capacity of human reason, such as that God is three and one; yet there are others that natural reason can attain, such as that God exists, that God is one, and others of this kind, which even philosophers have proved about God through the light of natural reason."[1] Some obvious questions ensue. If some claims about God are acknowledged to be beyond reason's competence, then how can a person be confident and indeed certain that they are true? Thomists adopt the traditional view that the truths about God that are the object of faith are nonetheless held by the believer to be certainly true despite the lack of rational evidence. Yet how can a belief be certain without evidence? This leads to a second question: are these truth claims beyond natural reason's ken inferentially related to the philosophical truth claims about God within reason's ken? Do the latter provide any kind of prior epistemic justification for the former or do they serve some other role? To put the central issue in contemporary terms: what is the Thomist position with respect to the evidentialist challenge that religious beliefs require evidence? In terms of the problematic of this chapter: how are religious truth claims related to other knowledge claims?

In order to answer these questions, four topics need to be considered in turn. The first concerns the *praeambula fidei* (literally, "preambles to faith"), which is Aquinas's occasional term for the set of truths regarding God and creatures that can be rationally established by demonstrative philosophical argumentation (in the Aristotelian sense of *episteme*). The role such philosophical argumentation has in justifying faith has long been a matter of debate and misunderstanding within the Thomistic tradition. It will be argued in the first section of this chapter that such philosophical argumentation does not provide probative rational evidence for an individual's act of faith. In other words, knowledge of the *praeambula fidei* is neither necessary nor sufficient for an individual's coming to believe in God. According to Aquinas, the motivation for belief is solely reliance under grace upon God's self-revelation, and what pertains strictly to faith (as opposed to what can be

[1] SCG I, 3.

known either by philosophical argumentation or by faith – but not by both at the same time) is beyond rational comprehension on this side of the beatific vision. If this is the case, then another topic emerges that will be the subject of the second section: How can faith be a genuinely *intellectual* act resulting in truth and certainty when it inherently lacks rational evidence? This will lead to an exploration of the nature of faith as a theological virtue in an attempt to account for its peculiar feature vis-à-vis other kinds of intellectual acts: it reliance upon the will in assenting to truth. The third concern will be to see that while an individual act of faith does not rest on rational evidence, nevertheless philosophical evidence plays a necessary and vital role in the work of theology. The distinction between the role of philosophical evidence in an individual act of faith, on the one hand, and in theology, on the other hand, is crucial to sorting through what can appear to be inconsistent or misleading claims in Aquinas, and the failure to make this distinction helps explain why Thomists have argued among themselves for so long on this topic. While a believer need not be a philosopher, a theologian must be one because theology necessarily presupposes philosophy. The third section will accordingly explore the distinction between theology and philosophy and the role of the latter within the former. Finally, the fourth section will try to clarify the Thomistic account of the relationship between reason and faith, philosophy and theology, over against alternative contemporary views in the context of the old question of whether there is such a thing as "Christian Philosophy."

## I. THE PROBLEM OF THE *PRAEAMBULA FIDEI*: WHAT SORT OF RATIONAL JUSTIFICATION DOES FAITH REQUIRE?

In an illuminating mid-century study of the meaning of the *praeambula fidei* in Aquinas, Guy de Broglie argued conclusively that the Cartesian quest to provide rational grounds for the justification of faith had led to a massive misunderstanding among Thomists of the relationship between rational justification and faith.[2] Like many other historical-textual studies in the first part of this century, de Broglie's work helped show how reading Aquinas within the context of an alien problematic could skew interpretations. In the pre-Cartesian context in which Aquinas wrote, there was no concern to provide some kind of antecedent rational justification for faith on the basis of philosophical argumentation for the existence of God and/or conclusive evidence for the reality and veracity of divine revelation. As Nicholas Wolterstorff has noted, medieval speculative arguments establishing the existence of God and other truths pertaining to the faith were an exercise in *fides quarens intellectum* leading to a deeper joy in the faith; they should not be confused with the role of such argumentation in the post-Enlightenment apologetic project of responding to the evidentialist challenge.[3] Concomitantly, medieval accounts of the genesis of faith in an individual believer were not focused on the problem of establishing the need for compelling rational grounds, but rather on how God's grace entered efficaciously into an individual's moral striving toward the good.

[2] Guy de Broglie, S.J., "La vraie notion thomiste des *praeambula fidei*," *Gregorianum* 34 (1953): 341-389.

[3] "The Migration of Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 38-81.

With this kind of hindsight, the Thomistic discussion of the grounds of faith in the early part of this century becomes more intelligible.[4] Within the context of both post-Cartesian evidentialist apologetics and the challenge of modernism, Thomists tried to steer some sort of middle course between overly fideistic and overly rationalistic accounts of faith. The two key figures in the debate were Ambrose Gardeil, O.P. and Pierre Rousselot, S.J.. The very title of Gardeil's seminal work, *La crédibilité et l'apologétique* (first edition, 1907), highlights the post-Cartesian problematic. The central issue in the debate concerned the grounds for a rational judgment of credulity prior to a full-blown act of faith. How does faith come to seem rationally attractive to an individual? On what was such a judgement based? What was the force of the evidence or the level of certainty, and how did that relate to the freedom of the act of faith? At what point was divine grace necessary? All these questions were posed within a consciously apologetic context wherein the burden of proof seemed squarely on the shoulder of the theologian to defend the rationality of faith. Within this context, interest was focused less on the need for speculative arguments for the existence of God than on the need to show how belief in divine revelation was rational based on the confirmation provided by miracles and other divine signs (e.g. prophecy) of its veracity. Throughout this long-running discussion within the Roman Catholic world, all the contending parties sought to ground their solutions in appeals to Aquinas's authority. What they did not realize, however, was that they were asking him to address a problem that did not occur to him.

Although there were some points of deep disagreement between them, both Gardeil and Rousselot tried to transpose the Neoscholastic discussion of the rationality of faith through a recovery of a more authentically Thomistic account of faith as a graced response of the whole person, intellect and will, to the personal self-revelation of God. Gardeil's important contribution in this regard was to situate the individual's act of faith within the context of a person's overall moral striving; faith is more like a moral decision than a disinterested speculative judgement, and Gardeil showed how Aquinas's account of the structure of moral action illuminated the structure of the act of faith. Gardeil's stress on the role of the will in coming to faith was a needed corrective to the prevailing tendency towards overly intellectual accounts of faith and thus something of an acknowledgment of the force of Maurice Blondel's critique.[5] Gardeil maintained that there was a rational judgment of credulity prior to faith that attained something like subjective certainty; in the second edition (1912) of *La crédibilité*, however, he recognized that such a judgment must be under the influence of grace or else it would seem as if some kind of Pelagian intellectual striving was the grounds for faith.

Rousselot was concerned to argue against a view of faith wherein some kind of prior natural rational judgment of credibility was followed by a supernaturally meritorious will act. Rousselot's rich and complex account of faith cannot be articulated here,[6] but what is important in the present context is that he effectively put the lie to the view that faith was based on the antecedent recognition of rational

[4] For an overview of this discussion, see Aubert, *Le problème de l'acte de foi*.

[5] On this point, see McCool, *Neo-Thomism*, 43-74.

[6] See Aubert, 452-470. See also John M. McDermott's "Introduction" to Rousselot's *The Eyes of Faith*, translated by Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

evidence by the light of natural reason. Faith is not an irrational act since the believer does need to come to see it as rational on the basis of visible signs of God's revelation and/or some philosophical argumentation for the existence of God. What Rousselot argued, however, is that any rational assent to signs as coming from God or to arguments as a call from God to believe must already be under the influence of divine grace; that such a process necessarily involves the interpenetration of will and intellect; and that the rational force of the evidence is not like the scientific certitude described in Neoscholastic manuals but rather like the process described in Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. The title of Rousselot's work, *Les yeux de la foi* (*The Eyes of Faith*), highlights the central aim: to construe faith as imparting a new dimension of intelligibility opened up to the believer by the influence of grace. The believer differs from the non-believer not primarily in *what* he or she sees but rather in *how* he or she sees. The believer interprets what is seen in the light of faith as signs of divine revelation. It is rational for the believer to assent based on what is seen through the eyes of faith, but that evidence has no pure, neutral, evidentiary force. The Thomistic debate about the nature of faith (which will be explored in the next section) was destined to continue for a long time after Gardeil and Rousselot, yet there was a general consensus that whether in the case of the philosophically sophisticated or the philosophically simple, the act of faith is not grounded in rational evidentiary considerations.

A careful reading of Aquinas's doctrine of the *praeambula fidei* in their original context reveals that he did not regard the *praeambula* as providing antecedent philosophical justification for the act of faith. The doctrine belongs in the context of Aquinas's treatment of the relationship between philosophy and theology, not of the motives for individual belief. An early treatment reads:

> It is impossible that what belongs to philosophy should be contrary to what belongs to faith, but rather fall short of it. Yet philosophy contains certain preambles to faith, just as nature itself is a preamble to grace. . . . [The first way in which we can use philosophy within theology is] in order to demonstrate the preambles to faith, which are necessary to the knowledge of faith, as what can be proven about God by natural reason, such as that God is one and whatever else can be proven by philosophy about God and creatures, and so is presupposed by faith.[7]

It is vital to distinguish what is rationally presupposed by theology and what is rationally presupposed by an individual believer. As we shall see in the third section, the exploration of faith by theology does depend upon and rationally presuppose philosophical conclusions about God and creatures. But the philosophical truths presupposed by theology are in no way necessary presuppositions to an individual's act of faith. It is possible, of course, that an individual believer may come to know certain philosophical truths about God and creatures prior to faith, and this knowledge may serve to dispose an unbeliever to

[7] DT 2, 3. Parallel passages are ST I, 2, 2 ad 1; ST II-II, 1, 5 ad 3; ST II-II, 2, 10, ad 2; III Sent. d.24, q.1, a.2, (sol. 2); DV 14, 9 ad 8 and ad 9.

the action of grace.[8] Yet such philosophical knowledge about God is neither normal nor necessary in the psychogenesis of faith. It is not normal because it is accessible only to a few people, after a long period of time, and with a great mixture of error.[9] What can be known philosophically about God is more usually accepted on the basis of revelation. Aquinas is careful to emphasize in this context that one and the same person cannot both know and have faith in the same truth at the same time; the two states are mutually exclusive.[10] There are some truths about God that can either be known philosophically or accepted by faith; there are others, however, that can only be accepted by faith (e.g. the Trinity) and are never known. Philosophical knowledge of God is not necessary because faith itself suffices to teach the believer whatever could also be known by philosophy: "Because faith, taken in itself, sufficiently inclines the believer to all things which pertain to, follow from, or are presupposed by faith."[11]

A key text for the discussion of the rational presuppositions of faith is Aquinas's reply to an objection that if faith is understood as believing something to be true because it is pleasing to God to do so, then some prior knowledge of God is logically required. To this objection Aquinas replies:

> To the ninth objection it must be said that someone can begin to believe what he had not previously believed but had rather only feebly considered. Hence it is possible that prior to believing God, one could have had a feeble notion that God exists and then come to believe in God because it is pleasing to God. And thus one can believe that God exists because it is pleasing to God, even though the existence of God is not an article of faith but rather something presupposed because it can be rationally proven.[12]

The only previous requirement for belief is some intellectual consideration of the possibility of the existence of God; a putative believer needs to at least be able to entertain the idea that there might be a God in order to come to believe in God. Yet such a weak opinion hardly could pass an evidentialist test.

Coming to faith for Aquinas is not a matter of being convinced by arguments, because no rational argument can provide evidence for what belongs strictly to faith.[13] As we shall see in the next section, Aquinas's account of faith insists that the truths that can only be known on the basis of revelation (as opposed to the *praeambula fidei*) necessarily lack any rational evidence to the believer. Neither do miracles or signs provide some kind of quasi-inductive rational warrant for belief since, as Rousselot argued, such "evidence" can never produce objective certainty and is only persuasive on the basis of the interior movement of grace. The need for grace in order for credibility arguments to have any persuasive force is emphasized

[8] See M.F. Sparrow, "The Proofs of Natural Theology and the Unbeliever," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65 (1991): 129-141.

[9] SCG I, 4.

[10] ST II-II, 1, 5-6.

[11] III Sent., d.24, q.1, a.2, sol.2.

[12] DV 14, 9 ad 9.

[13] "Faith is said to be beyond reason not because no act of reason is involved in faith, but rather because an act of reason within faith cannot produce insight into what belongs to faith." DV 14, 2 ad 9.

by Aquinas in numerous texts. In replying to an objection that either faith presupposes prior rational evidence that seems to threaten its freedom and merit, or it lacks evidence and so it seems irresponsible, Aquinas says:

> One who believes has sufficient grounds for belief, for he is led by the authority of divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, more importantly, by the inner inspiration of God inviting him to believe. Hence he does not *believe lightly*. But he does not have sufficient grounds for scientific knowledge, and so merit is not taken away.[14]

In another passage Aquinas answers the question of whether faith is infused by God:

> When it comes to the assent of persons to what belongs to faith, two causes need to be considered. The first is an exterior inducement to belief in the form of miracles witnessed or a human appeal urging one to faith. Neither of these is sufficient to cause faith, however, because when it happens that people witness the same miracle or hear the same preaching, some believe and some do not. And hence it is necessary that there be another kind of cause which moves a person interiorly to assent to what belongs to faith. The Pelagians believed that freedom of choice was the interior cause of faith and because of this they argued that the beginning of faith was from us, meaning that it is out of our own resources that we are ready to assent to matters of faith, while the consummation of faith comes from God, who proposes to us what we ought to believe. But this view is false because by assenting to what belongs to faith, a person is elevated above his nature and this necessarily requires a supernatural principle moving him interiorly, namely God. Hence the assent of faith, which is its principal act, comes from God moving us interiorly through grace.[15]

Miracles and prophecy do not provide some kind of prior rational evidence sufficient to induce faith, since they can only be recognized as such through the influence of grace. Miracles, prophecy, the history of the Church, and philosophical speculation may all play a motive role in an individual's decision to believe, but none of these grounds – individually or cumulatively – provides demonstrative rational evidence for faith. Faith assents to the truth of something precisely and only because it is revealed by God as First Truth.

There is one context, however, where Aquinas seems to give some comfort to what John Jenkins has called the "naturalist interpretation," i.e., the view that credibility arguments based on natural theology and apologetics can provide the

[14] ST II-II, 2, 9 ad 3.

[15] ST II-II, 6, 1. It should be noted that there is some development in Aquinas's thought on the way in which even the preparation for grace must itself already be under the influence of grace as a result of his greater knowledge of Augustine and semi-Pelagianism. On this point see Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez St. Thomas d'Aquin*.

rational justification for a person's assent to faith.[16] The context in question is the discussion of what kind of faith can be attributed to the devils when their faith cannot be based on the adherence of their wills to God as their ultimate good and so cannot have any merit. Aquinas there describes an alternative way of assenting to what is proposed for belief:

> There is another way of coming to assent when the intellect becomes convinced that it ought to judge as worthy of belief what is proposed to it, even though it is not convinced on the basis of evidence regarding what is proposed. For example, if some prophet announces in his preaching that some future event will happen and adds to this the sign of raising someone from the dead, the intellect of one seeing this will be convinced by this sign to know clearly that the prophecy was spoken by God who does not lie, even though the future event prophesied would not be evident in itself and so would remain a matter of faith. . . . In this second way the devils have faith because they see many clear indications from which they perceive that the Church's teaching is from God, although the things themselves which the Church teaches they do not see, such as that God is three and one or other such matters.[17]

Terence Penelhum has argued that this text supports the view that credibility evidence is sufficient to move the intellect to belief,[18] but a closer reading makes it clear that it does not.[19] Aquinas's discussion of the devils' intellectual capacity to evaluate miraculous occurrences is no grounds for asserting a comparable capacity in the human intellect because there is a great discrepancy between human and angelic cognition;[20] even in their fallen condition, the devils retain their superior natural intellectual capacity and a qualified access to some revealed knowledge.[21] This discrepancy between the human and angelic conditions is highlighted in the reply to the second objection where Aquinas specifically states that "while the faith which is the gift of grace inclines a person to believe according to some love of the good, even if that love is not charity, the faith which is in the demons is not the gift of grace, but rather they are impelled to believe by the perspicuity of their natural intellect."[22] Even with such superior intellectual capacity, however, the demons can have no insight into revealed truths such as the Trinity. They have evidence of the truth of the Church's proclamation based on their ability to see the confirmatory evidence, but even they have no rational insight into the truths pertaining to God's own being.

In terms of contemporary categories then, Aquinas is clearly not an evidentialist because he does not hold that faith must have rational evidence, and indeed he explicitly denies that compelling rational evidence can be given for properly

[16] John Jenkins, C.S.C., *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 163-175. Jenkins argues persuasively against the naturalist interpretation, which he attributes to John Hick, Terence Penelhum, Alvin Plantinga, and Louis Pojman.

[17] ST II-II, 5, 2.

[18] "The Analysis of Faith in Thomas Aquinas," *Religious Studies* 3 (1977): 133-154.

[19] See Jenkins, 169-172.

[20] On angelic cognition in general, see ST I, 54-58.

[21] ST I, 64, 1.

[22] ST II-II, 5, 3, ad 1.

theological claims. This does not mean, however, that Aquinas should be classified as a straightforward fideist either since, as we shall see, he holds that reason has an important role in supporting and sustaining belief. Aquinas does not fit neatly into any contemporary category.[23] As Lubor Velecky puts it, Aquinas would have sympathy for both sides without being completely comfortable with either:

> Aquinas endorses Fideism in so far as he thinks that no one can reach the faith position by philosophical arguments alone. But he agrees also with the Rationalists that Philosophy can make a significant contribution to one's belief/unbelief. For he thinks that both the acceptance and the rejection of faith entail certain philosophical theses which can be argued on the a-personal level of philosophy alone. The acceptance of certain philosophical theses chimes in with, and strengthens one's belief position; likewise the acceptance of opposite philosophical theses is logically incompatible with and rules out a rational acceptance of faith. However, what a person *decides* to think and do about the *prima facie* revelation is not determined at the level of logic. It is decided in history by individual persons who remain responsible for this choice as for any other they make in history. Which way persons decide this matter remains a mystery.[24]

Thomists can thus find something significant to agree with in both sides of the evidentialist-fideist debate without occupying either position. They can agree with fideists that faith is not based on rational evidence, while agreeing with the evidentialist that religious truths ought to have some rational support. In the way that I am framing the question, Thomists can be in sympathy with fideists when it comes to the role of rational evidence in an individual's choice to believe, while also being sympathetic to evidentialists when it comes to explaining the role of reason within theology. To see more how the former is so, we must turn now to the nature of faith; to see how the latter is so will be the object of the third section.

## II. FAITH AND BELIEF

Aquinas asserts that faith is the most certain of all the intellectual virtues, even though it lacks the rational evidence that grounds the certitude of the other intellectual virtues.[25] On the face of it, this is a peculiar claim: how can there be certainty apart from rational evidence? The short answer, of course, is that God is the guarantee of certainty. The longer answer, which is the burden of this section, must begin with this shorter answer because often contemporary treatments of faith in Aquinas neglect the essentially *theological* and supernatural character of his account. Faith is one of the three classic theological virtues (the others are hope

[23] See Ralph McInerny, "Analogy and Foundationalism in Thomas Aquinas," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 280-288.

[24] Lubor Velecky, *Aquinas' Five Arguments in the* Summa Theologiae *Ia 2, 3*, (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 13. Velecky's book argues for some intriguing affinities between Aquinas and Wittgenstein on religious belief.

[25] ST II-II, 4, 3.

and love).[26] Like the other kinds of virtues, moral and intellectual, theological virtues are dispositions for acting well in the pursuit of one's ultimate good. What distinguishes the theological virtues, however, is that they perfect the human person in the movement toward inter-personal union with the triune God as the ultimate Good surpassing the capacity of human nature. The theological virtues therefore presuppose the action of God's grace elevating the capacities of the human person to engage in intentional activities that bear directly upon God as end or object. This is the meaning of Aquinas's general claim that God is the formal object of the theological virtues.[27] In Aquinas's schema of human action, dispositions are individuated fundamentally by their formal objects and secondarily by the power or capacity thus engaged. The formal object of an act is the specific feature of the reality engaged that motivates the agent's interest and provides the formal resources for the agent's action. Intentional action involves engagement with realities outside the agent which are causally involved in the explanation of the action as providing the form of the action; the object determines the action to be a specific kind of action. Human action is a response to formal realities which provide resources for self-perfective activity. To say then that the theological virtues have God as their formal object is not to make some innocuous claim that somehow they are "about God" or "concern God," but rather to make a bold claim that God is directly engaged in such action both as immanent formal resource and as terminus. Theological virtues bear upon God because God first gives Himself to human beings so that human knowing and willing can be a genuine knowing and willing of *God*, indeed a genuine sharing in God's own knowing and willing. The central theological truth at the heart of the *Summa theologiae* is that God's unmerited gift of Himself to us in grace makes us sharers in the divine nature.[28] Aquinas is a realist about grace as giving us a share in God's life. This grace is a gratuitous gift that cannot be achieved by autonomous human action. Unlike the acquired moral and intellectual virtues, the theological virtues must be infused by God and cannot be generated by human action; as capacities for knowing, hoping in, and loving God, they are beyond human nature's ability to generate and so can be exercised only as gifts.

Faith is the theological virtue of the intellect and Aquinas asserts that its formal object is God as First Truth. Faith is first an acceptance or an assent to God and then to whatever is revealed by God precisely because it is revealed by God. Aquinas writes:

> Accordingly, if we consider the formal object of faith it is nothing other than First Truth. For faith as we are describing it does not assent to anything except that it is revealed by God, hence faith rests upon the divine truth itself as a kind

[26] On the basic idea of a theological virtue, see ST I-II, 62, 1.

[27] The best introduction to the language of object and how it functions in the *Summa theologiae* is T.C. O'Brien, "Objects and Virtues," Appendix I, in the Blackfriars' *Summa theologiae*, Vol. 31, *Faith* (2a2ae. 1-7), (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 178-185. My entire account is heavily indebted to O'Brien.

[28] See ST I-II. 110, especially a.4 on the way in which grace enables us to share in God's own knowing and willing.

> of medium. But if we look to the material content of what faith assents to, then it concerns not only God but also many other things.[29]

Materially speaking (the so-called material objects of faith), faith assents to many truths as contained in Scripture, the Creed, and the teachings of the Church. But the formal motive for faith's assent to these truths is the fundamental assent to God himself as First Truth. Faith first of all accepts God as the Revealer revealing himself and then accepts whatever is revealed by God. The authenticating motive (the medium) for all that faith assents to is that it is revealed by God (*quod est a Deo revelatum*).

Contemporary accounts of faith in Aquinas usually do not grasp the full import of the object language and so tend to construe the object of faith as primarily propositional rather than personal. When Aquinas directly considers the question of whether propositions are the object of faith, he makes a distinction between what we know and how we know.[30] Because human knowing is necessarily complex and propositional, faith knowledge is always through the modality of propositions (*per modum propositionis*); we have no other mode of cognition in this life. Hence, as known by us, the object of faith is propositional. When considered in itself, however, the object of faith is simple: God. We know and express the truth about the God who is simple through complex propositional judgements, but that does not mean that we mistake the mode of our knowing with the object's own mode of being. Nor must we make the mistake of thinking that because we know in a propositional mode, all that we know is a proposition. Aquinas stresses that just as through propositional knowing we actually attain the real, so through assent to faith propositions we actually assent to the living God:

> As is clear from its language, the Creed expresses those things which belong to faith insofar as they are attained by the believer's act. But the act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in the reality itself; for in both scientific knowledge and faith, we only form propositions so that we might know the things themselves.[31]

The formal motive of faith's assent – because it is revealed by God – entails that faith is not based on rational evidence. As Aquinas explicitly puts it: "cognitional imperfection is included in the very definition of faith."[32] Aquinas highlights the cognitional imperfection of faith by contrasting it with three other perfected kinds of knowledge. The first is the beatific vision, which faith inchoates; this eschatological dimension will be taken up later. The other two foils are natural: first and most properly, the knowledge of first principles through *intellectus* (Aristotelian *nous*) and then the knowledge of demonstrative conclusions through *scientia* (Aristotelian *episteme*). The contrast of faith with *intellectus* and *scientia* is part of Aquinas's effort to find a place for faith within an Aristotelian cognitive landscape. As M.-D. Chenu argued in a seminal study, the audacious originality of

[29] ST II-II, 1, 1.
[30] ST II-II, 1, 2.
[31] ST II-II, 1, 2, ad 2.
[32] ST I-II, 67, 3.

Aquinas was precisely this attempt to analyze the religious act of faith, previously considered within an Augustinian noetic, according to the scientific categories of Aristotle.[33] Aquinas would obviously have to transpose the Aristotelian categories in order to make room for an intellectual act that could claim certitude without rational evidence but rather on the basis of love.

In distinguishing faith from *intellectus* and *scientia*, Aquinas contrasts the way that the intellect assents to something on the basis of rational evidence with the way that it assents to something on the basis of faith.[34] Through *intellectus* the mind grasps the essence of a thing as it is expressed in a definition. Once the intellect penetrates to a grasp of a thing's essence, it naturally, spontaneously, immediately, and reliably assents to the knowledge expressed in the definition without deliberation or choice. Aquinas describes this knowledge as a kind of seeing or vision because it is like the certitude of sight properly functioning in the face of its own object.[35] This grasp of essences is often referred to as the knowledge of first principles because it forms the basis for the subsequent inferential knowledge of *scientia*.[36] Faith's assent to truth obviously cannot be like *intellectus*, since our minds cannot penetrate the essence of God, even under grace.[37] If the believer cannot grasp the primary articles of faith like *intellectus* grasps first principles, then obviously there can be no genuine *scientia* of faith since the latter presupposes the grasp of first principles as its foundations.[38] There can be no *scientia* of matters that pertain strictly and formally to faith, as opposed to those truths which have the status of *praeambula fidei* and so can be known scientifically.

While faith lacks the rational evidence of *intellectus* or *scientia*, it nonetheless shares with those states the quality of certitude. Certitude in this context refers to "the firmness of the knowing power's adherence to the known object."[39] This certitude distinguishes faith from opinion, another state lacking rational evidence; whereas opinion assents with a nagging worry that the opposite viewpoint is perhaps true (*cum formidine alterius*), Aquinas holds that faith is even more certain than *intellectus* or *scientia* objectively speaking because it is caused by God. On the subjective side, however, it is less certain because it is a certitude without

[33] "La psychologie de la foi dans la théologie du XIII[e] siècle, II-II, q. 2, a. 1" in his *La parole de dieu I: La foi dans l'intelligence* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 77-104. The article originally appeared in 1932. On the same text, see also Robert Bellemare, "*Credere*. Note sur la définition thomiste," *Revue de l'université d'Ottawa* 30 (1960): 38*-47*.

[34] DV 14, 1.

[35] ST I, 67, 1.

[36] Recent interpreters of Aquinas have disagreed about how his account of the knowledge of first principles and its relationship to inferential knowledge or *scientia* maps onto the contemporary categories of epistemology. A good place to start is Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas*. I differ with Jenkins on many points at issue in this chapter, but I am in general agreement with him and Eleonore Stump that Aquinas is something of a "theological externalist" when it comes to the justification of knowledge. Aquinas takes it for granted that our intellects are designed by God to penetrate into the essential structure of reality so as to be able "to cut the world at its joints."

[37] The incomprehensibility of God, even in the beatific vision, is a major theme in Aquinas that will be discussed in the next chapter.

[38] ST II-II, 1, 5. The fact that faith cannot involve *scientia* in the strict sense raises a problem about the epistemic status of theology that will be considered in the next section.

[39] III Sent. d. 26, q. 2, a. 4.

intellectual evidence.[40] This peculiar kind of certitude disengaged from rational evidence is one of Aquinas's key innovations within the Aristotelian framework. Aristotle's sense of certainty was primarily object-orientated; it was rooted in the mind's ability to penetrate into the essential structures of reality and register essences through formal assimilation. Aquinas's account allows for non-essential, non-cognitive, subjective factors to induce certitude: "faith has certitude on the basis of something outside the order of cognition, something belonging rather to affect."[41] The lack of rational evidence is remedied by the involvement of the will.

Precisely how the will is involved in faith and especially how it provides certainty without evidence has been the subject of much dispute in the literature because Aquinas himself is not as forthcoming as one would wish on the topic. *De veritate* 14, 1 contains the most extensive and potentially misleading account:

> In some cases the intellect cannot be determined to one side of a contradiction either immediately through a definition of the terms themselves, as in first principles, or through such principles leading to demonstrative conclusions. In such cases the intellect is determined by the will, which chooses to assent to one alternative precisely on the basis of something which is sufficient to move the will but not the intellect, for example because it appears good or appropriate to assent to one alternative. And this is the disposition of the believer, as when someone believes on the basis of the words of another because it seems fitting or useful. And thus we are moved to believe what is preached to us insofar as the rewards of eternal life are promised to us if we believe; by such a reward the will is moved to assent to what is proposed, even though the intellect is not moved by anything understood.

What is potentially misleading about this account is that it appears to make belief into a kind of pragmatic or utilitarian choice based on anticipated future rewards; it is as if Aquinas were advocating a policy whereby one ought to believe what promises the greatest future benefit when rational evidence is lacking and all other things are equal. James F. Ross has argued along these lines based on the above text.[42] Yet Ross and other contemporary philosophical interpreters of Aquinas who neglect the larger theological context fail to make the right connections in elucidating the role of the will in faith. The lesson taught long ago by Gardeil was that one can only make sense of a person's decision to believe in the larger context of the person's dynamic moral striving toward the ultimate good under the influence of divine grace. Faith is but one aspect of a whole person's total response to God as the Good. The truth adhered to in faith is a truth about beatitude: "the First Truth, the object of faith, is the end of all our desires and actions."[43] Faith

[40] ST II-II, 4, 8. See also I, 1, 5.

[41] III Sent., d. 23, q.9, a.2, sol.1, ad2.

[42] See "Aquinas on Belief and Knowledge," in *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter*, ed. W.A. Frank & G.J. Etzkorn (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 1985), 245-269 and "Believing for Profit," in *The Ethics of Belief Debate*, ed. Gerald D. McCarthy. American Academy of Religion Series, ed. Charley Hardwick & James O. Duke, no.41 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 221-235. See the critique by Jenkins, 175-185.

[43] ST II-II, 4, 2, ad3.

presupposes some prior moral movement of the will toward God as the ultimate good of the person.

There is an important distinction in Aquinas between the will's role when a person first comes to believe, and the will's role when someone is subsequently living the complete life of the theological virtues. The process of coming to faith involves first of all some kind of intellectual awareness of the possibility of the existence of God, usually from hearing the proclamation of the gospel (*fides ex auditu*); through this proclamation the gifts of eternal life are proposed to someone. Faith thus does presuppose some prior knowledge of God; the will cannot act blindly but only on the basis of some prior intellectual awareness wherein God becomes the possible object of the will's intention as ultimate end. Once proposed to the person, the goods of eternal life arouse within an individual a desire for the goods promised. This initial movement of the will towards God is the beginning of faith because it is on this basis that the will commands the intellect to believe. In an early text Aquinas describes the psychogenesis of faith:

> Just as the end is first in intention and last in realization, so whenever something is closer to the end it is prior in intention but posterior in realization according to the order of time or nature. Hence hope, insofar as it is closer to the achievement of the end than faith, precedes faith in intention but not in realization. Accordingly, we say that hope leads to faith, not because it already exists, but because it proposes future goods. So when goods are proposed to someone, first he wants them; second, he wants to cleave to them in love; third, he wants to hope for them; and fourth he wants to believe them; so that by believing he may thus hope, love, and possess. In this way, faith is first to come into being.[44]

Faith presupposes a prior movement of desires that eventuates in the will's influence on the intellect to assent in faith to God as the first step toward hoping in and loving God (the latter two presuppose faith as a prior condition). The initial movement of the will towards God, in effect the moment of conversion, is only possible under the inner influence of divine grace as *instinctus*; God and his rewards can only become attractive to us as good under the influence of the Holy Spirit.[45]

The act of the will that precedes and imperates faith is not yet the love of charity but rather an intention or desire to love; as Aquinas notes, one kind of affection precedes faith, another follows from faith. Once a person accepts the truth about God in faith, then the will is able to love God with the love of charity. Indeed, the paradigm act of will in faith is charity, the love whereby we enjoy a friendship with God based on God's sharing of his own happiness with us.[46] Aquinas describes charity as the "form" of faith (and hope) because it directs and perfects faith; love

[44] III Sent. d.23, q.2, a.5, ad4. For more on the psychogenesis of faith and related issues, see Benoit Duroux, O.P., *La psychologie de la foi chez S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Desclée, 1963).

[45] On the complicated question of the inner working of grace in faith, see the classic work by Max Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: 1961). See also the review by Edward Schillebeeckx in *Revelation and Theology*, Trans. N.D. Smith, Vol. 2 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 30-75.

[46] ST II-II, 23, 1.

of God is the end towards which faith is directed.[47] Aquinas's account of faith normally presupposes that it is joined to charity as the act of will motivating the intellect's assent. This emerges clearly in Aquinas's discussion of the Augustinian articulation of faith as to believe by God (*credere Deo*), to believe in God (*credere Deum*), and to believe unto God (*credere in Deum*).[48] The first describes the formal object of faith, the second the primary material object, while the third describes the movement of love cleaving the believer to God. Formed faith is based on a lover's assent in trust rather than on rational calculation of self-interest.

It is important to keep in mind that the will adds no new intellectual content to what is believed; it does not somehow supply the evidence lacking to the mind. Faith remains formally an intellectual act ordered to truth but lacking evidence. The will explains the firmness of assent and the resulting certitude, but it does not remedy the intellect's want of evidence. Because the motive for assent is extrinsic to the intellect, the believing intellect remains incomplete and unsatisfied. The intellectual restlessness of faith is brought out in Aquinas's appropriation of the Augustinian definition of faith as "to ponder with assent" (*cum assensione cogitare*).[49] Aquinas defines the relevant sense of *cogitatio* as a thinking that is accompanied by a certain searching prior to finding completion in vision. Faith's intrinsic lack of intellectual evidence involves an implied reference to its completion in the vision of God that is beatitude. Aquinas constantly contrasts the intellectual imperfection of faith with vision precisely because it is ordered to the latter as its completion. Faith is an eschatological foretaste of beatitude.[50] The intellectual restlessness of *cogitare* also explains both the genesis of and the need for theology. The believer's mind wants to probe deeper into the mystery, to grasp something of the meaning of what has been revealed. In discussing whether having reasons for faith lessens the merit of faith, Aquinas states: "When someone has a ready will to believe, he loves the truth believed and ponders and treasures any supporting reasons he might be able to find."[51] Faith inevitably seeks understanding, prodded and steadied by love. Out of faith thus comes an internal need for theology and philosophical evidence.

## III. THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Faith inevitably seeks understanding (*fides quarens intellectum*). Faith thus demands a theology or "holy teaching" (*sacra doctrina* is Aquinas's preferred term for what we would call theology) exploring the new intelligibility of reality revealed by God the First Truth; it is a *doctrina* that explores the godly view of the whole opened up by faith.[52] Aquinas begins his analysis of *sacra doctrina* in the

[47] ST II-II, 4, 3.

[48] ST II-II, 2, 2.

[49] ST II-II, 2, 1.

[50] See Daniel Bourgeois, "*Inchoatio vitae aeternae:* La dimension eschatologique de la vertu théologale de foi chez saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Sapienza* 27 (1974): 272-314.

[51] ST II-II, 2, 10.

[52] The nature of *sacra doctrina* is much-disputed among Aquinas's interpreters. While in this context I stipulate that the English term "theology" is roughly equivalent to *sacra doctrina*, this is problematic for two reasons. First, Aquinas himself would have distinguished *theologia* as but one part of *sacra doctrina*. Secondly, our understanding of theology differs from both Aquinas's *sacra doctrina* and *theologia*. For the most recent and reliable scholarship on this topic, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., "Le

*Summa theologiae*: "I say that it was necessary for human salvation that there be a teaching following from divine revelation (*secundum revelationem divinam*) other than the philosophical disciplines (*praeter philosophicas disciplinas*) that are investigated by human reason."[53] As T.C. O'Brien has demonstrated, the description of theology as *secundum revelationem divinam* holds the key to the proper interpretation of Aquinas's understanding of *sacra doctrina*.[54] The necessity of another body of knowledge in addition to the already established disciplines (*praeter philosophicas disciplinas*)[55] follows from the revelation by God that humanity is called to a destiny beyond the ken of natural reason.[56] Following genetically or sequentially from the encounter with God revealing, there arises the need for another teaching or intellectual discipline in conformity with the new dimension of intelligibility disclosed by God. Revelation discloses that the *philosophicas disciplinas* do not exhaust the intelligibility of the real because the world as manifested to human reason is an incomplete manifestation of the world's meaning to the Triune God.

The conformity to divine revelation implied by *secundum revelationem divinam* means more than that *sacra doctrina* develops in a manner that is logically consistent with what has been revealed. At the deepest level *secundum revelationem divinam* implies a conformity of perspective, a seeing with God; it is a teaching that strives to display the luminosity and intelligibility that matters believed have in God's own mind. The way in which a new intelligible unity or whole is displayed in *sacra doctrina* is explained by Aquinas in response to the question of whether or not *sacra doctrina* is one science.[57] Aquinas begins by recalling the basic axiom that acts, powers, virtues, and ways of knowing are specified by their formal objects. The sciences are diversified by the different dimensions of intelligibility latent in reality;[58] different habits of knowledge correspond to the different dimensions of intelligibility. What specifies and diversifies *sacra doctrina* as a distinct discipline is the new intelligibility of reality opened up by divine revelation: "Since holy scripture considers things insofar as they have been divinely revealed (as already noted), all things whatsoever that are revealable by God (*revelabilia*) share in the one formal object of this science."[59] The term *revelabilia* here bears the burden of describing the new horizon opened up by divine revelation; it denotes the capacity for reality to be grasped in the light

savoir théologique chez saint Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996): 355-396. Torrell's article contains references to all the important earlier treatments. See also Henry Donneaud, O.P., "Insaisisable *sacra doctrina*," *Revue Thomiste* 98 (1998): 179-224. I have adapted material used earlier in my "*Sacra doctrina* and the Theology of Disclosure," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 163-187.

[53] ST I, 1, 1.

[54] T.C. O'Brien, "*Sacra doctrina* Revisited: The Context of Medieval Education," *The Thomist* 41 (1977): 475-509.

[55] As O'Brien shows, *philosophicas disciplinas* refers to the entire corpus of human learning. "*Sacra doctrina* Revisited," 478-492.

[56] ST I, 1, 1.

[57] ST I, 1, 3.

[58] The classic text of the diversification of the sciences is DT 5, 1.

[59] ST I, 1, 3. Aquinas shifts between *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina* as if the two were largely synonymous throughout the question on *sacra doctrina*. While the terms are not synonymous, there is a close connection. See the works by Torrell and Donneaud cited above in n. 52.

of divine revelation.[60] The formal object of *sacra doctrina* is the intelligibility of the world as spoken by God. *Sacra doctrina* is a sharing in God's unified view of the whole as an impression on us of God's own knowledge (*impressio divinae scientiae*).[61] Thus theology is not simply a matter of communicating new information but rather a matter of articulating an entirely new view of reality.

The scope and unity of the new intelligible whole given by divine revelation involves an ordering: "it [*sacra doctrina*] treats principally of God and then of creatures insofar as they are related to God as their principle and end."[62] God is the true subject of *sacra doctrina* and everything else is considered as related or ordered to God (*sub ratione Dei vel secundem ordinem ad Deum).*[63] Thus nothing lies outside the scope of *sacra doctrina* because in the great going forth and return (*exitus-reditus*) of creation everything has God as its source and end. *Sacra doctrina* attains a share in God's own knowledge of the whole and thus constitutes a radically new kind of wisdom.[64] In the light of this new wisdom, the conclusions of philosophy are not annulled but rather relativized; they are seen now as providing only partial manifestations of the world's full meaning. It belongs to *sacra doctrina* to bring the partial perspectives into the unified whole disclosed by divine revelation.

In its sapiential function, theology appropriates the findings of the philosophical disciplines for its own purposes. In a classic text, Aquinas describes the relationship between theology and philosophy as follows:

> The gifts of grace are added to nature in such a way that they do not destroy it, but rather perfect it; so too the light of faith, which is imparted to us as a gift, does not annul the light of natural reason given to us by God. And although the natural light of human reason is inadequate to make known those things revealed by faith, nonetheless it is impossible that what is given to us in faith by God be contrary to what is implanted in us naturally. For one would have to be false, and since both of them are given to us by God, this would make God the source of error, which is impossible. . . . It is impossible that those things which belong to philosophy be contrary to the contents of faith, but rather they fall short of them. Philosophy bears certain likenesses to faith and also preambles to faith, just as nature itself is a preamble to grace.[65]

[60] The meaning of the term *revelabilia* has long been a matter of dispute and a proper understanding of it is the key to grasping the meaning of *sacra doctrina*: "The term does not stand for the later scholastics' 'virtually revealed,' i.e. deducible from the data of revelation. Nor does it have the meaning given in the fanciful interpretation that it covers truths which, in distinction from the *revelata*, could possibly be revealed, but need not be because they are accessible to unaided reason. In its context *revelabilia* means simply the quality, the formal interest, or intelligible value in every subject matter that engages the act of *sacra doctrina*." O'Brien, *"Sacra Doctrina* Revisited," 502-503. Etienne Gilson is one of those who has consistently misunderstood the meaning of *revelabilia* in the way described by O'Brien. For a discussion of Gilson's views, see Henry Donneaud, "Notes sur le *revelabile* selon Etienne Gilson," *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996): 633-652.

[61] ST I, 1, 3 ad 2.

[62] ST I, 1, 3 ad 1.

[63] ST I, 1, 7.

[64] ST I, 1, 6.

[65] DT 2, 3.

Aquinas had a robust confidence that theology could approach the findings of philosophy with confidence because the natural, philosophy's domain, originated from the one God who is both the Creator of nature and the Giver of grace. Nature is a preamble to grace in the sense that grace can only be appreciated against the backdrop of the natural; we can only understand what is new and gratuitous in grace by seeing it as profiled over against what is originally given by God in the creation of nature. Precisely as *super*natural, grace needs the natural as its proper foil. So too theology needs philosophy to articulate the natural in order to make possible its own articulation of the supernatural.

In the same text, Aquinas goes on to identify three specific ways in which theology uses philosophy: to demonstrate the preambles of faith, to illuminate faith through philosophical concepts, and to refute assertions contrary to faith. I will focus on the first way and then say something briefly about the other two. It is often not noticed that the *praeambula fidei* cover a wide range of truths that can be established by reason: "the preambles to faith, which are necessary to the knowledge of faith as what can be proven about God by natural reason, [comprise issues] such as that God is one, and whatever else can be proven by philosophy about God and creatures and so is presupposed by faith."[66] Indeed the preambles comprise all the philosophical truths presupposed by theology. A good example of their range can be found in the first three books of the *Summa contra gentiles*, where Aquinas as sapiential theologian articulates the philosophical truths about God, creation, and human nature that are relevant to theology.[67] It is vital to note that precisely insofar as they are viewed as preambles to *faith*, these philosophical truths are taken up into the formal domain of theology. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas acknowledges that he is following a specifically theological order by beginning with God and moving to creatures; the proper mode of preceding in philosophy would be to begin with creatures and then move to God.[68]

In this context it is important to emphasize the formal difference between the way philosophy approaches God and the way that theology considers God. In his classic discussion of the division and methods of the sciences in the commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*,[69] Aquinas divides the speculative sciences into three branches: natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics or theology. Each has its own distinct subject (*subjectum*), based not just on what it studies, but also on the formal perspective under which it considers its domain of objects. Metaphysics considers as its proper subject *ens commune* (what is common to being as being). In studying the principles of what is common to being as being, metaphysics

[66] DT 2, 3. Parallel passages are ST I, 2, 2 ad 1; ST II-II, 1, 5 ad3; ST II-II, 2, 10, ad2; III Sent. d.24, q.1, a.2, sol. 2); DV 14, 9 ad8 and ad 9.

[67] On the essentially theological character of the *Summa contra gentiles*, see René-Antoine Gauthier, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Somme contra les gentils. Introduction.* European Philosophy Series, ed. Henri Hude (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1993). For a different reading, see Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in* Summa contra gentiles *I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). I think Kretzmann is wrong about the nature of the *Summa contra gentiles* because he misunderstands the relationship between philosophy and theology in Aquinas.

[68] SCG II, 4.

[69] The questions (five and six) are masterfully translated and commented upon by Armand Maurer in *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, Fourth revised edition. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986).

studies what is common to all beings as their universal cause. Metaphysics thus extends to the knowledge of God as the terminus of its inquiry when its analysis of being as being leads to the conclusion that a universal cause of being is required that is called God. It is precisely and only in this way that metaphysics arrives at a consideration of the existence and nature of God. Metaphysics does not study God as its subject, but rather as the cause of its proper subject. Insofar as metaphysics finds its natural telos in God as ultimate explanatory principle, it is also the science of the divine or theology.[70]

While recognizing that metaphysics extends to the divine, it must also be kept in mind that its cognitive purchase on God is extremely limited. Metaphysics arrives at a knowledge *that* God exists on the basis of its analysis that the sensible beings of our experience require a higher-order explanatory principle. Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God all fasten on different formal features of the real (change, causality, etc.) as manifesting a metaphysical limitation that requires the ultimate causality of a being with no such limitations. The arguments arrive at the conclusion that God exists under some metaphysical description that is essentially connected with God's causal function vis-à-vis the real. Aquinas is emphatic that while metaphysics can know *that* God exists, it cannot know *what* God is.[71] Much more will be said in Chapter Eight about our knowledge of God. In this context what is important is to mark the formal difference between strictly metaphysical knowledge of God and theological knowledge of God. The former is an oblique, indirect, and inferential knowledge of God as cause that is inadequate to God in Himself because the world, which is the basis for our knowledge, is a radically incomplete manifestation of the reality of God. Theology, by contrast, presupposes an immediate knowledge of God as He is in Himself based on God's self-disclosure; it presupposes the action of grace and the theological virtues. Metaphysics-*cum*-theology's approach to God is formally distinct from revelation-based theology's approach to God and has nothing whatsoever to do with establishing any *praeambula fidei*. Metaphysics approaches God as its own *telos*, and that *telos* has nothing to do with providing evidentiary grounds for revelation-based theology but rather is meant to satisfy the mind's search for an ultimate causal explanation of the world.

When metaphysical arguments are employed by theology as *praeambula fidei*, they formally become part of theology in its sapiential role; in this sense, philosophical wisdom is transformed into theological wisdom.[72] Yet if the *praeambula fidei* are not necessary in an evidential or justificatory sense to theology, just what is their role? If theology does not need to demonstrate rationally the existence of God in order to justify its inquiry, then why does it appropriate such argumentation? Why, for example, does Aquinas claim in the

[70] The most extensive Thomistic analysis of metaphysics' consideration of God is found in O'Brien, *Metaphysics and the Existence of God*. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 11-22.

[71] A key passage in ST I, 3, 4 ad 2 argues that knowing the truth of the judgment "God exists" should not seduce us into thinking that we thereby know something about the very existence of God.

[72] In the course of replying to the fifth objection of DT 2, 3, Aquinas says that "those who use the works of philosophers at the service of faith in theology do not mix the water [of philosophy] with the wine [of theology] but rather change the water into wine." This was one of Gilson's favorite texts to describe the role of philosophy within theology. See his *The Philosopher and Theology*, 101.

*Summa contra gentiles* that the arguments for the existence of God must be considered first as the necessary foundation (*necessarium fundamentum*) of the entire work?[73] Why are they given pride of place in the *Summa theologiae* as the first topic of consideration after the nature of *sacra doctrina* itself? In the post-modern context, it is easy to mistake this mode of procedure as manifesting evidentiary concerns. Yet in neither case is this what explains Aquinas's procedure. In general, the question of the existence of God belongs to theology because of *Romans* 1: 19-20: "Ever since the creation of the world God's invisible nature, namely his power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that are made." More specifically, however, the question is connected to the peculiarly theological character of each work. The *Summa contra gentiles* is a work of sapiential theology designed to manifest the truth of the Catholic faith in such a way as to pay special attention to the ways in which that truth can be expressed in terms of the new Aristotelian philosophy; the reverse side of this concern is to refute erroneous interpretations of Aristotle (mainly Arabic) which appear to be at odds with the Catholic faith.[74] Given the aim to show the truth about God and the relationship of all things to God in competition with competing Arisotelianisms, it is not surprising that the work begins with Aquinas's most detailed analysis of Aristotelian arguments for the existence of God.[75] The point of the arguments for the existence of God is not to justify belief against atheists but rather to locate the Christian God on the map of the Aristotelian universe. The philosophical argumentation for God establishes the referent of theology's discourse within the reflection on experience opened up by reason.[76] In the *Summa theologiae*, the arguments for God serve the different formal requirement of showing how theology's peculiar subject matter nonetheless coheres with the Aristotelian ideal of a demonstrative science which requires that there be some evidence for the existence of the subject. Normally a demonstrative science does not prove the existence of its own subject matter; theology, however, is a special and complicated case.[77] While much more could be said, by now the basic point should be clear: the *praeambula fidei* are not designed to meet evidential tests.

Since the number of theologically relevant truths that can be demonstratively established by reason is rather small, philosophy's role would be limited if its role within theology were restricted exclusively to providing apodictic argumentation. In *Summa contra gentiles* I, 9, however, Aquinas recognizes that non-demonstrative philosophical arguments pertaining to matters beyond reason's ken have an important role in sustaining believers, though they must not be mistakenly proposed to non-believers as having probative value. Aquinas warns that it is an abuse of philosophy to try to provide rational evidence for properly theological

[73] SCG I, 9.

[74] See Gauthier.

[75] SCG I, 13.

[76] Lubor Velecky provides the best contemporary account on the role of God-arguments within theology in his *Aquinas's Five Arguments in the* Summa theologiae 1a. 2, 3. He says that Aquinas employs them to "integrate the proposition 'God exists' into his universe of discourse" (37).

[77] See O'Brien, *Metaphysics and the Existence of God*, 179-214.

truths under the mistaken idea that "one should be willing to believe only what can be established by philosophy."[78]

The second role of philosophy within theology is to provide conceptual resources for explorations into the intelligibility of strictly theological truths. A good example of this would be the case of the Trinity, where concepts drawn from philosophy (e.g. analyses of knowing and willing) are employed to help explain the Three-Personed God.[79] In such cases the role of philosophy is not to provide evidence for the truth of theological claims but rather to provide conceptual resources for explaining what is accepted on the basis of faith.

The third major employment of philosophical reasoning within theology is to defend faith from intellectual attack. Because both reason and faith ultimately originate in God, Aquinas is confident that they can never contradict each other. What this means is that when theological truths are subjected to philosophical criticism, theology can meet the criticism on philosophy's own grounds rather than resorting to theological authority. Theology can use philosophy to show that claims against theological truth do not have philosophically probative force. Aquinas envisions this happening in two ways. Sometimes theology can effectively refute philosophical counter-claims by showing them to be impossible. This seems to require giving demonstrative proof of the claim allegedly contradicted by philosophy. For example, if a philosopher purports to prove there is no God, his claim is shown to be impossible by a demonstration of God's existence. Not many of theology's claims are verifiable in this fashion, however, so theology also uses philosophy to show that arguments against the faith are not completely probative by the canons of Aristotelian science. Since this basic stance lies at the heart of the Thomistic understanding of how to handle scientific claims that appear to contradict theological claims, I shall postpone extensive discussion of it until Chapter Four. What needs to be stressed here is that Aquinas's original pre-modern understanding of the apologetic role of philosophy within theology is aimed not at providing evidence for theological claims but rather at countering philosophical argumentation purporting to undermine theological claims. There is an important difference between actively trying to ground theological claims in philosophical evidence on the one hand, and defending theology against putative antithetical philosophical evidence on the other hand. Properly theological truths that can only be known by faith simply do not admit of rational justification.

## IV. PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

What emerges from this account of the thought of Aquinas is a formal separation in Thomism between philosophy and theology. Philosophy proceeds by the light of natural reason to investigate truths that it is competent to know on the basis of the human intellect's capacity to arrive at knowledge of the essences of material objects and their causal interconnection. The human intellect is created by God as a reliable and adequate instrument for discerning the intelligible structure of the material world. The progression of knowledge as embodied in the

[78] DT 2, 3.

[79] Ibid. The best contemporary Thomistic exploration of the Trinity is William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983).

speculative sciences comes to fruition in metaphysics, which eventuates in an indirect and inferential knowledge of the existence of a First Cause that merits the appellation God because it is the highest and most perfect being. Metaphysics knows that such a First Cause must exist and what must be true of it if it is to fulfill the metaphysical function of explaining the being of what is intrinsically limited. Ultimately metaphysics has no direct knowledge of what God is because the human intellect is naturally incapable of grasping the essence of such an immaterial object.

Theology presupposes faith as a necessary condition. Faith assents to truths which paradigmatically lie beyond reason's capacity either to establish or comprehend insofar as they pertain to God's own being and knowing. Faith thus presupposes no prior rational justification. Faith is not a natural act of reason but rather presupposes the influence of God's grace on the entire person and especially the will. The new horizon of intelligibility opened up by the light of faith is explored by theology. Faith provides the motive for thinking beyond the natural. Theology has an unrestricted domain of inquiry wider than and encompassing what can be established by the human sciences under the natural light of reason. Theology as wisdom assumes the findings of philosophy within its own proper work to perform various tasks, but it does not need them for epistemic justification. It should be noted that the Thomistic conception of theology presupposes philosophy as an instrument; it is unthinkable that theology could do its proper work without a highly sophisticated philosophy.

The formal difference between philosophy and theology that Aquinas established, and which Thomists have traditionally respected, has been challenged at two different moments in this century by what appears to be a hybrid idea of Christian philosophy. The first challenge was posed by Etienne Gilson in the ways outlined in the previous chapter.[80] Outside of Gilson's school of Thomism, however, his idea of Christian philosophy met with widespread disagreement from other Thomists.[81] By now the basic reason should be clear: it was in violation of Aquinas's own explicit and carefully drawn formal distinction between philosophy and theology. Yet while most Thomists reject Gilson's views on Christian philosophy, they would readily concede that faith can and should influence how a person philosophizes. Jacques Maritain, for example, held that considered purely as an intellectual discipline, philosophy is independent of Christian faith in its object, principles, and methods; in its actual state in a philosopher, however, philosophy can be Christian.[82] Indeed, Maritain argued that philosophy needed to be Christian because the life of grace made it possible to avoid serious error and to penetrate more completely into philosophical truths. Another way of parsing the distinction would be to say that while there cannot be Christian philosophy, there can be Christian philosophers whose faith will have a profound guiding influence

[80] See pp. 10–13.

[81] For references to the key figures and texts in the Thomistic debate about Gilson, see John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy" and "The Possibility of a Christian Philosophy: A Thomistic Perspective," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 272-290.

[82] For an overview of Maritain's views on Christian Philosophy, see McCool, "From Unity to Pluralism," 145-146. Maritain's major work on the topic is *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955).

on their thinking. John F. Wippel has described this Christian influence as belonging to the order of discovery, as opposed to the order of proof, and he allows for a qualified kind of Christian philosophy as compatible with Thomism.[83] Faith commitments may determine one's intellectual research program by providing questions or hypotheses for inquiry; faith guides both positively and negatively by suggesting some topics for investigation and by ruling out some positions. But if it is to be a genuinely philosophical research program, rather than a theological one, then both the topics considered and the evidence offered must conform to the canons internal to philosophy at the moment of proof.

Within the context of the current debate about Christian Philosophy, however, the traditional Thomistic doctrine has been criticized for overly circumscribing philosophical reflection on theological topics because of a too rigid adherence to the Aristotelian model of demonstrative science. Scott MacDonald has argued that contemporary natural or philosophical theology should be broadened beyond the restrictive Aristotelian model of demonstrative proof so as to allow for dialectical philosophical consideration of traditional theological topics like Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement.[84] In this broader construal of natural theology, even revealed propositions could be the basis for philosophical reflection because appeals to testimony or authority have some rational justification as the basis for dialectical reasoning. MacDonald further argues that philosophical theology should not restrict itself to matters of justification (either dialectical or demonstrative) but should also engage in the project of the clarification of doctrinal beliefs; as MacDonald points out, the latter activity does not depend upon the former – you can clarify a theological thesis without having prior epistemic justification, just like you can clarify a hypothesis before seeking its justification. To put the matter another way, one can explore the logical implications of the antecedent in a conditional proposition with respect to its consequent without asserting the truth of the antecedent. MacDonald exhorts contemporary Christian philosophers to take up what he sees as the great medieval project of justifying and especially clarifying Christian belief.

There is much that a traditional Thomist might quarrel with in MacDonald's account. My purpose in referring to his views, however, is not so much in order to critique them as it is to illustrate how differently Thomists see the relationship between philosophy and theology from philosophers of religion operating outside of that tradition. From the standpoint of the Thomistic tradition, the kind of intellectual activity that MacDonald describes is properly the domain of theology in its sapiential role rather than philosophy when the topics under consideration are revelation-based truths accepted by faith. MacDonald is right to describe Aquinas as a practitioner of philosophical theology, but Aquinas would have understood his activity as formally belonging to theology and not to philosophy. It is the work of theology to investigate how what is believed to be true in faith is so, and it uses

[83] "The Possibility of Christian Philosophy," 279-284.

[84] Scott MacDonald, "What is Philosophical Theology?" in *The Presumption of Presence: Christ, Church and Culture in the Academy*, ed. Peter McEnhill and George B. Hall (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1996), 61-81.

philosophy both to justify and to clarify what is believed.[85] From the Thomistic point of view, much of what is called Christian Philosophy in the contemporary arena looks like an unacceptable blurring of the lines between philosophy and theology. Contemporary talk of "philosophical theology" is thus problematic for a Thomist. The term makes sense to a Thomist as a description of a certain aspect of theology or as a species of theology. Thomists cannot conceive of theology without a philosophical component; as we have already established, theology needs philosophy to perform its intellectual task. But Thomists would consider "philosophical theology" inappropriate as a description of a purely philosophical activity unless it were meant as a description of metaphysics in its investigation of ultimate causes; as a description of a putatively purely philosophical exploration of revealed truths, "philosophical theology" is not possible within the Thomistic framework.

While much more might be said on this topic, let me conclude by saying that the ultimate reasons why Thomists want to keep the intellectual map drawn in the traditional way are rooted in theology rather than philosophy. It is true that a fundamental rationale for circumscribing philosophy's domain is based on anthropological, epistemological, and metaphysical claims; according to standard Thomistic doctrine, human nature on its own simply is not capable of knowing much about the mystery of God. But there are still deeper motives for wanting to circumscribe the domain of philosophy and maintain theology's exclusive rights to such topics as the Trinity and the Incarnation. The deepest reason is that Thomists hold that when it comes to the truth that God has revealed regarding himself and our salvation, we can investigate it truly only with God's own help. True thought about such matters cannot be based on autonomous human reason or pure intellectual acumen. Theology is an expression of the intellectual dimension of the full life of grace in a human person that presupposes the virtues, membership in a worshiping community, a prayer life, and the guidance of an authoritative tradition. Aquinas's own life provides the paradigm case of the necessary interconnection between theology and divine grace.[86] So when, in the passage beginning this chapter, he distinguishes between the truths about God that surpass the human intellect and those that do not, he believes that the only way we can think about the first set of truths is by sharing in God's own thinking. To believe that we could intellectually fathom these truths by our own thinking would be to fall into presumption and error. When it comes to the truth about God, we can only learn it by accepting God as our one Teacher of Truth.[87]

[85] In QL IV, 9, 3, Aquinas says that one of the main tasks of the teacher of theology is to show how what is accepted on the basis of faith's authority is true.

[86] This is the pervasive theme of Torrell's two-volume work on Aquinas.

[87] ST II-II, 2, 3.

# 3. Religious Language

Perhaps no other topic treated in this book has generated more secondary literature among Thomists in the twentieth-century than the problem of religious language. The *crux interpretatum* concerns Aquinas's central claim that certain predicates derived from creatures can be said to be true of God *analogically*. Aquinas offers analogical predication as steering a middle course between the Scylla of univocity (where the predicate has the same meaning), which would compromise divine transcendence by purporting to compass God within a creaturely concept, and the Charybdis of equivocity (where the predicate has no shared meaning), which would evacuate the language of faith of any cognitive content and so lead to agnosticism. In working out his doctrine of analogical predication, Aquinas is thus trying to balance the demands of apophatic or positive theology, the legacy of the western tradition, and kataphatic or negative theology, the legacy of the eastern tradition. Thomists have typically hailed the results as one of the most original and enduring features of Aquinas's thought, while non-Thomists have sometimes wondered what all the fuss was about.

Two factors are chiefly responsible for the proliferation of studies on analogy in this century. The first is criticism from outside the Thomistic tradition in both theology and philosophy. On the theological front, Karl Barth's well-known dictum that the supposed Catholic doctrine of *analogia entis* (the analogy of being) is "the invention of the Anti-Christ," and because of it "one cannot become a Catholic,"[1] was rooted in the conviction that God's transcendence requires that God be absolutely inaccessible from any purely creaturely point of departure; human speech about God is only possible on the basis of God's self-revelation in the Word. Other Protestant theologians, most notably Wolfhart Pannenberg,

[1] *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, Part I: *The Doctrine of the Word of God,* trans. G.T. Thompson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936) p. x. It has since been argued by many that Barth's critique of analogy does not really apply to Aquinas himself and that there are actually points of deep agreement between them. See Hans Urs von Balthasar in *The Theology of Karl Barth,* trans. J. Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Henri Bouillard, *La connaissance de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1967); Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, second edition (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1968); and Henry Chavannes, *L'analogie entre Dieu et le monde selon Thomas d'Aquin et selon Karl Barth* (Paris: Cerf, 1969). A recent work is Eugene Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

likewise criticized analogy on the grounds that it compromised both the primacy of God's self-revelation and God's transcendence.[2] On the philosophical front, the persistent critique of analogy, going all the back to John Duns Scotus, has been that analogy is really nothing more than veiled univocity.[3]

The second factor explaining the proliferation of studies on analogy has been the realization within the Thomistic tradition that its own understanding of Aquinas had long been distorted by the normative status accorded to the interpretation of the great sixteenth-century commentator Cardinal Cajetan in his *De nomine analogica et de conceptu entis*.[4] Cajetan's views on analogy largely held sway among Thomists up until around the midpoint of this past century, when a series of ground breaking studies displayed the discrepancy between Aquinas's texts and Cajetan's doctrine.[5] The critics of Cajetan have identified three basic deficiencies in his account.[6] First, Cajetan failed to grasp the way in which Aquinas's thought on analogy developed over the years. Cajetan erroneously assumed a uniform doctrine and so unwittingly based his account on early texts that do not represent Aquinas's mature view. Specifically, what Cajetan identified as the true Thomistic doctrine of analogy – which he called the analogy of proportionality, as distinct from what he called the analogy of attribution – was only a provisional position that was ultimately abandoned by Aquinas.[7] Second, Cajetan's doctrine tends to run together logical, epistemological, ontological, and theological considerations that need to be distinguished. Analogy is a logical doctrine of naming that is connected with how we know, and that can be applied in the domains of metaphysics and theology. Third, Cajetan is reproached for having located analogy at the level of concepts instead of recognizing it as a feature of judgments; concepts only function analogically as embedded in the lived usage of judgments. Thomists now generally agree that Cajetan was in error on all three points, and have spent the last few decades reconstructing Aquinas's authentic doctrine in

[2] See Elizabeth Johnson, "The Right Way to Speak about God? Pannenberg on Analogy," *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 673-692.

[3] On Scotus's views, see Olivier Boulnois, "Analogie et univocité selon Duns Scot: La double destruction," *Les études philosophiques* 3-4 (1989): 347-369. For critiques of analogy as veiled univocity from two different perspectives, see Patrick Sherry, "Analogy Today," *Philosophy* 51 (1976): 431-446 and Kai Nielson, "Analogical Talk about God: A Negative Critique," *The Thomist* 40 (1976): 32-60.

[4] This work has been translated into English by E. Bushinski and H.J. Koren as *The Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being*, Duquesne Studies, Philosophical Series, no. 4 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1953).

[5] Georges Klubertantz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy. A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola, 1960). Ralph McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961). Bernard Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être selon s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1963).

[6] I am following the outline here of Gregory P. Rocca, O.P. in *Analogy as Judgment and Faith in God's Incomprehensibility: A Study of the Theological Epistemology of Thomas Aquinas* (Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1989), 33-49. This dissertation is the most comprehensive and insightful treatment of the topic that I know and this chapter bears a substantial debt to Rocca's work.

[7] Cajetan's major division of analogy into proportionality and attribution are unhelpful categories that have been largely abandoned by Thomists. I do not want to muddy the waters here by trying to explain his doctrine. The interested reader can find accounts of Cajetan in the references of the previous two notes.

ways that answer both the philosophical and the theological criticisms. This chapter is a distillation of that work.

One of the major clarifications to emerge out of the discussion of Cajetan has been the need to distinguish between analogy as a feature of our religious language about God and analogy as a metaphysical doctrine explaining how the various senses of being are unified. This chapter is designed as an explanation of the former rather than the latter.[8] Yet at the same time as religious analogy has to be distinguished from metaphysical analogy, it nonetheless must be understood that Aquinas's doctrine of divine names rests upon epistemological and metaphysical foundations; we name God as we know God and our knowledge of God involves some metaphysical claims. Hence the first part of this chapter will articulate the epistemological and metaphysical foundations of analogy. The second part will be an analysis of how analogical predication works. While analogy is central to Thomistic accounts of religious language, it does not exhaust its domain. The third part of the chapter will discuss the other main types of religious language about God: metaphorical and relational. Finally, Aquinas considers the summit of religious language about God to be expressed in Exodus 3:14, and his metaphysical interpretation of that divine self-revelation will thus be the focus of the final section. There we shall consider the question of whether Aquinas constructs a metaphysical idol of God in terms of the contemporary discussion of onto-theology in the pejorative Heideggerian sense.

## I. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND TO ANALOGY

Aquinas inherited from Pseudo-Dionysius a conception that the path to God must be threefold: the way of causality (*via causalitatis*), the way of negation (*via negativa*), and the way of eminence (*via eminentia*). While Aquinas's terminology is fluid and diverse orderings can be found in his writings,[9] the order given here best describes the logic of his approach.[10] Analogy belongs in the third moment, the way of eminence, and so logically presupposes the other two ways. We must first begin with the way of causality in order to establish the metaphysical link between God and the world that is needed to warrant the cognitive move from the world to God. The metaphysical realization that God is the cause of the world requires that God be utterly unlike any being in the world, so the way of causality leads immediately to the way of negation. The way of negation depends not just upon metaphysical considerations, however, but also on epistemological and anthropological claims regarding the limitations on human knowing. It is only on

[8] It is well known that Aquinas never explicitly designates his doctrine of how being is unified by the term "analogy of being." Nevertheless it is generally agreed that such a term is appropriate for the way in which he adopts Aristotle's doctrine of *pros hen* equivocation. The classic work on this point is Montagne's *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être*. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 73-93.

[9] Michael B. Ewbank, "Diverse Orderings of Dionysius's *Triplex Via* by Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 52 (1990): 82-109.

[10] See Claude Geffré, "Théologie naturelle et révelation dans la connaissance de Dieu un," in *L'existence de Dieu*, Cahiers de l'actualité religieuse 16 (Paris-Tournai: Casterman, 1961), 297-317. Also, Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, O.P., "La théologie negative chez S. Thomas d'Aquin" *Revue thomiste* 93 (1993): 535-566; 94 (1994): 71-99.

the basis of these prior moves that analogy as a form of the way of eminence can be understood.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God are foundational to his theological approach to God. Aquinas emphatically eschews any sort of Anselmian *a priori* approach to the existence of God and hews instead to an *a posteriori* approach wherein certain features of the world are subjected to a metaphysical analysis that ultimately results in the conclusion that they are causally dependent upon some higher-order being. In the famous passage from *Summa theologiae* Ia. 2, 3, motion, efficient causation, contingency, degrees of perfection, and teleology are all shown to require a higher-order cause that cannot itself display any of the metaphysical limitations that characterize the explananda.[11] There must be a cause of motion that is not itself moved, an efficient cause that is not itself efficiently caused, a necessary being that has its necessity from itself, a cause of all perfections that is maximally perfect, and an intelligent cause of finality and order. Each of these formally distinct metaphysical first causes is theologically identified with the God of faith on the basis of the doctrine of creation. The Provident Creator God confessed in faith must be the ultimate source of all that is, maximally perfect, and the intelligent governor of the world.

It would be erroneous, however, to infer that the ascription of all these metaphysical titles to God warrants an immediate move along the path of positive or affirmative theology. Indeed precisely the opposite is the case. Once God is accorded metaphysical primacy as ultimate actuality, then the immediate conclusions to be drawn are along the *via negativa*. The reason for this is that the First Cause must be utterly unlike everything else; it must transcend all the features of the world that bespeak metaphysical limitation or imperfection. So the affirmation of the *via causalitatis* leads immediately to the *via negativa* as the negation of anything that is incompatible with God as First Cause and Pure Act. Negative judgments about God are made on the basis of prior positive claims about God's metaphysical primacy. The *via negativa* logically presupposes the minimal positive knowledge acquired by the *via causalitatis*; otherwise, the process of negation would be incoherent in that there would be no basis for determining what to negate about God.

At the heart of Aquinas's negative approach to God is the central claim that we cannot know what God is, but rather only what God is not or rather how God does not exist; Aquinas typically makes this claim after proving God's existence and before discussing his attributes.[12] This claim thus governs the entire discussion of divine attributes and it must be carefully parsed. One consequence of it is that much of what looks *prima facie* like positive predications of God are really negative: divine simplicity, immutability, eternity, infinity, etc. are all negative claims about God rather than positive attributes. These topics will be explored in Chapter Eight. In this context what is important is to note the way in which Aquinas thinks that a careful process of successive negations can lead to a kind of knowledge of what is proper to God. By denying more and more features of created being as applicable to God, we come to a clearer sense of how God

[11] For more on these arguments, see Chapter Eight, pp. 179–185.

[12] See the prologue to question 3 in ST I and SCG I, 14.

transcends created being. While this is a crude way of putting it, it is perhaps helpful to see much of Aquinas's doctrine of divine attributes as a skillful exercise in a theological game of Twenty Questions where the cumulative effect of the negations is to point the questioner in the direction of God without revealing what God is. As Aquinas notes, it is natural for us to advance in our knowledge of something by distinguishing it from what it is not. Normally the process precedes on the basis of a prior positive grasp of the genus of the object and the negations serve to pick out the differentiating features of the species. In the case of God, however, the process is exclusively negative because it is not governed by any positive grasp of God's essence in terms of genus or species. We cannot know what is proper to God in the positive sense of grasping the divine essence, but rather only in the negative or indirect sense of knowing what is proper to God as transcending every other being: "we arrive at a proper consideration of God's substance when we know God as distinct from all other things."[13]

The claim that we cannot have any definitional or classifying knowledge of God is expressed as the denial that we can have *quidditative* knowledge of God.[14] Quidditative knowledge, which literally means knowledge of a thing's "whatness" (quiddity), would be comprehensive and defining knowledge of a thing's essence. This kind of knowledge cannot be had of God for two reasons. The first and more basic is the metaphysical disproportion between Creator and creature. In discussing whether any created intellect is able by its own nature to grasp God's essence, Aquinas argues that such knowledge is impossible because God's transcendent mode of to-be or *esse* – unparticipated, uncomposed, and infinite – is beyond the intellectual ken of any being whose *esse* is participated, composed, and finite.[15] Even angels cannot naturally grasp God's essence, despite their superior cognitive capacities, due to their metaphysical limitation in the face of God's immensity of being. The second reason is species-specific: human intellects are naturally suited to grasp quiddities that are abstracted from material instantiation; obviously God is not such a quiddity.[16] Even the aid of divine grace does not make it possible for the human intellect to achieve quidditative knowledge in this life because faith knowledge never completely transcends the natural human mode of knowledge.[17] Knowledge of God's essence can only be had in the beatific vision by the light of glory; even there, however, quidditative knowledge will not be comprehensive knowledge: the Holy Mystery of God eternally remains beyond human comprehension.[18]

Aquinas's stress on the *via negativa*, expressed in the denial that we can attain any quidditative knowledge of God and in the ultimate assertion of God's

[13] SCG I, 14 and III, 39 and 49.

[14] See John F. Wippel, "Quidditative Knowledge of God" in his *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, 215-241 and *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 502-543. The seminal piece on this topic is H.F. Dondaine, "Cognoscere de Deo 'quid est'," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 22 (1955): 72-78.

[15] ST I, 12, 4.

[16] ST I, 12, 11.

[17] ST I, 12, 13, ad 3 and II-II, 1, 5 ad 1.

[18] ST I, 12, 7. See Karl Rahner, "An Investigation of the Incomprehensibility of God in St. Thomas Aquinas," in his *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 16, trans. D. Morland (New York: Seabury, 1979), 244-254.

incomprehensibility, does not mean, however, that we cannot have any positive or affirmative knowledge of God. Aquinas modifies the extreme *agnosia* of the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition by allowing for a limited, non-quidditative knowledge of God that is expressed in analogical language and that is rooted in the *via causalitatis*.[19] A causal analysis of the world leads to the knowledge that God exists and what must be true about God in order to account for God's causal primacy; as already noted, most of what belongs to the latter domain is negative. Yet while the world-as-effect does not provide an adequate basis for any quidditative knowledge of God's essence because of the metaphysical disparity between Creator and creature, nevertheless it does provide adequate grounds for a lesser kind of positive knowledge predicated upon causality. The key premise undergirding this claim is the metaphysical axiom that every cause communicates some kind of likeness of itself to its effect (*omne agens agit sibi simile*).[20] The likeness or similitude is conceived in terms of act (causality is the communication of actuality to what was previously in potency to act) and comprises both efficient and formal dimensions. So in causing the world, God communicates some similitude of his own being insofar as he is the efficient and formal-exemplar cause of all that is in any way. Ultimately, Aquinas expresses this metaphysical relationship in terms of participation, which is his conceptual device for articulating the causal relationship between God and the world, the One and the many. The details of this relationship cannot be articulated here,[21] but it must be noted how the metaphysics of participation and the theological doctrine of creation are the necessary conditions for Aquinas's doctrine of divine naming.[22] To put the logic of the position in the most straightforward way, the epistemological move from creatures to God presupposes the causal-ontological relationship of origination from God to creatures. The ontological similitude established by God's causality of creatures is the basis for the epistemological similitude requisite for the human mind to move from creatures to God. So while it is true to say that analogical predication of divine names is not itself a metaphysical doctrine, it does presuppose a metaphysical foundation.

Aquinas is quite careful to qualify the limited nature of the kind of similitude constituted by the causal relationship between God and the world.[23] In the usual cases of causality, the cause brings it about that the effect shares in the relevant actuality in the same mode that it exists in the cause; Aquinas calls this univocal causality. There are some cases, however, where the metaphysical disproportion between cause and effect means that the actuality communicated from the former

[19] See Gregory P. Rocca, O.P., "Aquinas on God-Talk: Hovering Over the Abyss," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 641-661.

[20] SCG I, 29.

[21] The best short introduction to the topic of participation in Aquinas is W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," in his *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 89-101. See also John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Participation," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 117-158 and his *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94-131.

[22] Klaus Riesenhuber, "Partizipation als Strukturprinzip der Namen Gottes bei Thomas von Aquin," in *Miscellanea Mediavelia*, Vol. 13/2, *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 969-982.

[23] SCG, I, 29.

to the latter is diminished such that it cannot be said either to be found in the same mode or to be expressible by the same intellectual concept (*ratio*). When the actuality found in the cause so exceeds the actuality found in the effect that they cannot be said to share in the common actuality or perfection according to the same mode or be grasped by the same concept, then the originating cause is said to be an equivocal or analogical cause. Typically, such a cause is the originating or universal cause of the perfection itself, and so is unlike everything else that derivatively shares in the perfection (this is the difference between being the perfection essentially and sharing in it by participation). This kind of causality sets up a dialectic of both similitude and dissimilitude; the effect is somehow similar to its cause by virtue of the perfection communicated, but it does not instantiate the perfection according to the same mode or concept.

What this causal schema means for the God-creature relationship is that the communication of being from God to creation entails that there is some kind of likeness in the latter as caused to the former as causal source. Any perfection found in the created world is so only as a likeness to its ultimate exemplar source in the mind of God; not according to the same mode or concept, however, but rather in the way that analogical or equivocal causes set up a disproportionate similitude. Whatever perfections God communicates to creatures pre-exist in God in a way that transcends any created mode or concept. The perfections found in creatures in a finite and differentiated way are originally in God as infinite, perfect, and undifferentiated. In the language of participation, for any perfection $p$, God's very being is identical with $p$ in infinite plenitude, while any creature only has $p$ in some limited and composed way in the mode of an effect. In order to safeguard the transcendence and causal primacy of God, Aquinas insists that it not appropriate to say that God and creatures resemble each other; it rather the case that it can only be said that creatures resemble God. As we shall see shortly, Aquinas is especially concerned to ward off any idea that God and creatures somehow are similar insofar as they share in something common like an abstract perfection. This would compromise divine transcendence by the subordination of God to some kind of a creaturely concept.

## II. ANALOGICAL NAMING OF GOD

Because we know something about God on the premise that creaturely perfections are causally derived from God, we can name God on the basis of that knowledge; naming follows from knowing. As already established, no name that we predicate of God could quidditatively capture the divine essence. Yet we can and do predicate some terms of God that we believe say something true about God's nature. At this point it is important to stress that Aquinas's account of analogical predication is understood by him to be a philosophical explanation of the living practice of believers. The starting point for reflection is not *whether* we can make true affirmative claims about God, but rather *how* it is that we do so (recall here that one of the functions of theology is to explain how what is believed is true). Aquinas takes as his starting point the practice of believers who think they are making true statements when they say such things as "God is good" or "God is wise." He rejects any attempt to interpret such statements as either disguised negative predications ("God is good" is really another way of saying that "God is

not evil") or disguised causal claims ("God is good" really means that "God is the cause of goodness") on three grounds. First, they cannot explain why we attribute some terms to God but not others. Since God causes everything, why not attribute every term to him? Or since God is not like everything else, is not any term equally applicable because equally inadequate? Second, Aquinas thinks that to construe positive predications as disguised causal claims runs the risk of implying that the term in question belong primarily to creatures and only derivatively to God. Third, the intention of those predicating such terms as "good" to God is to say something true about the way God really is (*substantialiter*); in other words, they think they are making genuine truth claims about God.[24]

The kinds of terms that can be said to belong non-metaphorically and properly to God are pure Anselmian perfection terms like "good," "wise," or "loving," whose applicability to God is based on their lack of any intrinsic note of creaturely limitation.[25] W. Norris Clarke describes such terms as "'open-ended' concepts whose range extends indefinitely beyond our present experience, at least in an upward direction,"[26] because their meaning does not depend upon material instantiation; they designate properties or attributes that we understand to bespeak pure perfections in being. We understand these pure perfections to belong truly and properly to God, even though we do not presume to know how they are realized in God. In order to make sense of this we have to distinguish between the perfection picked out by a term (*res significata* or thing signified) and the creaturely mode by which we signify that perfection (*modus significandi*).[27] Our mode of signifying perfections is inextricably connected with our finite mode of knowing with its finite range of objects. We only encounter perfections as limited and composed (as distinct properties of subjects) and our linguistic expressions reflect that mode of knowing. As Aquinas is fond of pointing out, we use concrete nouns like "good" or "wise" to pick out real finite perfections in subjects which are distinct from those perfections, while we use abstract terms like "goodness" or "wisdom" to denote the pure simple perfections themselves. The former signify real properties that are inherently composed, while the latter signify unreal or abstract properties that are simple. Because of what is implied by their modes of signifying, neither "good" nor "goodness" is adequate to express how the perfection they diversely denote is found in God. We can predicate both terms of God, but we must also deny that the perfection in question introduces any composition, limitation, or accidents into God, and we must deny that the distinction between abstract and concrete terms latches onto any distinction in God. Indeed the inadequacy of each's mode of signification requires that we assert them both in tandem, as a kind of reminder of the unique way that the perfection is realized in God and of the inadequacy of our knowing and naming to the mystery of how God is good and God is goodness; in God, the perfection subsists in infinite simplicity.

[24] ST I, 13, 2.

[25] ST Ia, 13, 3, ad 1 and SCG I, 30.

[26] "Analogy and Meaningful Language about God" in *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 132.

[27] See Gregory P. Rocca, O.P., "The Distinction between *Res Significata* and *Modus Significandi* in Aquinas's Theological Epistemology," *The Thomist* 55 (1991): 173-197. Evelyn Ashworth, "Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 39-67.

The central strategy of denying that the creaturely mode of signification applies to God but that the perfection itself is truly found in God does not mean that it is possible to distill out some kind of modeless concept of the perfection that we can then predicate of God. This is the worry that lurks behind the perennial suspicion that Aquinas's doctrine of analogy is really tantamount to a veiled univocity. We cannot escape our conceptual or linguistic skins so as to gain cognitive access to some pure modeless concept. When we deny that our modes of signifying can apply to God, we are asserting an agnosticism about how the perfections in question exist in God. When we say that "God is good," for example, we acknowledge that we do not know how God is good because we can have no concept of good as an infinite subsisting perfection identical with the divine *esse*. We know that God truly is good, but in a way that completely surpasses our conceptual ken. God is good in some supereminent way that we cannot grasp. What we know as the perfection of goodness in creation must pre-exist in God as its infinite causal source; how, we cannot know or signify. All human concepts are inadequate to express the transcendent perfections of God's being; God always remains incomprehensible to us, far exceeding the signification of any of our concepts.

Because of the discrepancy between the way in which perfections are found in God and in creatures, terms used in predications of both cannot share the same univocal meaning or *ratio*.[28] The denial that God and creatures can be compassed by a single concept does not mean, however, that names applying to both God and creatures have completely unrelated or equivocal meanings. If the same terms were used of both God and creatures without any relationship between their signification, then it would be impossible to move from a knowledge of creatures to a knowledge of God, and radical agnosticism would be the end result. Aquinas tries to steer a path between the extremes of univocity and equivocity by denying both: the denial of univocity rules out a single shared meaning and the denial of equivocity rules out completely unrelated meanings. What is left is the possibility of different but related meanings of terms used of both God and creatures. Analogy thus tries to chart a via media between the two extremes; although as Gilson was fond of repeating, analogy is much closer to equivocity than to univocity.[29]

Aquinas describes analogical predication as involving the multiple use of a term wherein the multiplicity is unified by a relationship or order to something one. It is in this context that he appropriates Aristotle's doctrine of *pros hen* equivocation and borrows Aristotle's examples of the way that healthy and being are said in multiple but related ways. Aquinas distinguishes between two different kinds of analogical predication: many to one (*multa ad unum*) and one to another (*unum ad alterum*). As an example of many to one analogy, Aquinas explains how "healthy" is said of animal as its subject, medicine as its cause, food as its means of conservation, and urine as its sign. Health belongs primarily and properly to the animal itself as describing its proper functioning as a living organism, while all the other uses are derivative by being variously related to the primary instance. Aquinas denies that this kind of analogy is operative between God and creatures

[28] ST I, 13, 5 and SCG I, 32.

[29] *Le thomisme*, Sixième Edition (Paris: J. Vrin, 1989), 123. See SCG I, 33.

because he is afraid that this model will involve conceiving God and creatures as both related to something third which would then achieve some kind of priority (even if only conceptual) over against God. In other words, to conceive God and creatures as both related to something else, like the concept of being or goodness, would be to give the latter a kind of priority that would threaten divine transcendence. God and creatures are not both named by the same term because they are related as a many to some prior unity, but rather because the perfection as found in the creature is related directly and dependently to the perfection in God: "Whatever is said both of God and creatures is said according to the order that creatures have to God as their principle and cause in which all the perfections of things pre-exist in a more excellent mode."[30] Aquinas thus argues that the analogy between God and creature is based on the relationship of one to another rather than on a mutual relationship to something else. This kind of analogy is like the way that being is said of both substance and accident. Substance and accident are not denominated being because they are both related to something else (like an abstract concept), but rather because substance is being in its primary and proper sense and accident is being only in a derivative and dependent sense. Being belongs first to substance and secondarily to accidents; the ontological dependence of the latter upon the former is reflected by the fact that accident cannot even be understood or defined apart from its dependence upon substance. In analogical predication there is always a relationship of priority and posteriority: the perfection in question belongs first (*per prius*) to the primary instance and only derivatively (*per posterius*) to all other instances. What this means in terms of the God-creature relationship is that when we predicate any term analogically of both, then whatever is referred to by the term (*res significata*) belongs primarily, perfectly, *per se*, and originally to God. When the same term is predicated of a creature, the creature is said to possess the perfection in a secondary, imperfect, caused, and participatory fashion; any creature is good only by sharing in an imperfect way in God's infinite goodness.

While according to the ontological order any perfection is found first in God and then derivatively in creatures, the opposite is the case when we consider the order of knowing. We first come to know and name a perfection as it is found in creatures, and then we apply the term to God. For example, we come to know what good is through our knowledge of creatures and on this basis we develop a concept or *ratio* of good that we express through the term "good". We then apply that term to God on the basis of the metaphysical truth that God is the infinite source and origin of all good such that everything else that is good is only so on the basis of being a limited participation in God's goodness. So while in the order of knowing we move from creatures to Creator, we do so according to an acknowledged primacy of God to creatures in the order of being.[31]

It is vital to keep three essential elements distinct in summarizing the basic doctrine of analogy: the perfection signified (*res significata*), the creaturely mode of signifying (*modus significandi*), and the creaturely concept of the perfection (*ratio nominis*). In predicating any perfection analogically of God and creatures,

[30] ST I, 13, 5.
[31] ST I, 13, 6.

we must deny that both the creaturely mode of signifying and the creaturely concept are applicable to God; it is only the *res significata* that we attribute to God. Often the doctrine is erroneously explained as if it involved only a denial of the *modus significandi*, leaving a thus purified concept to attribute to God; this would be veiled univocity. We cannot use anything but a creaturely concept with its creaturely mode of signifying when we think and speak about God. When we attribute perfections found in creation to God through such means, we want to affirm that the perfections are indeed truly found in God but deny that we have any concepts adequate to God's supereminent perfection.

Recognizing the ineradicable inadequacy of any creaturely concept to the mystery of God, and motivated by a reaction against the Cajetanian tendency to construe analogy as involving a veiled univocal concept, contemporary Thomists have stressed that analogy should be considered as a claim concerning how we make true judgments about God ("God is good") rather than a theory about how we apply concepts ("good") to God. What motivates this strategy is the belief that when the creaturely concept is used in an affirmative judgment, it somehow points beyond its inherent limitations to the mystery of God; in other words, creaturely perfection concepts cognitively point us in the right direction towards God or intentionally refer us to God, while nonetheless remaining inadequate to the mystery. Because Aquinas himself did not explicitly stress the connection between analogy and judgment or explore the way in which the finite concept somehow gives us access to God despite it limitations, different Thomists have offered different accounts of how analogy is a function of judgment.

One of the earliest and most persistent Thomists to emphasize the connection between analogy and judgment was Etienne Gilson.[32] Gilson thought that the basic difference between Scotus's univocity and Aquinas's analogy was that the former was about concepts while the latter was about judgments.[33] Gilson's position is based on a remark that Aquinas makes regarding our knowledge of God's being. In replying to an objection that we cannot assert that God's essence is identical with God's *esse* because that would entail that we could know God's essence, Aquinas replies:

> It must be said that "to be" (*esse*) can be said in two ways. In one way, *esse* signifies the act of being; while in another way it signifies the union of the predicate to the subject when we form propositions. In the first way of taking *esse*, we cannot know the *esse* of God nor the essence of God. But we do know that the proposition that we form of God when we say "God exists" is true. This we know from God's effects, as shown earlier.[34]

So just as when we assert the proposition "God exists," we know that it is true on the basis of God's causality without this implying that we have any grasp of what God's existence is like, so when we assert "God is good" we know the proposition is true without knowing what goodness is in God. Since divine simplicity demands

[32] See *Le thomisme*, 121-129. Humbrecht and Geffré (among others) are much influenced by Gilson.
[33] *Jean Duns Scot. Introduction à ses positions fondamentales.* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1952), 101.
[34] ST I, 3, 4, ad 2.

that all perfections that we attribute to God are really identical with God's essence (which is itself identical with God's *esse*), and since we cannot know God's essence, we therefore cannot know God's perfections either. When we say "God is good," the predicative "is" asserts the real and known unity in God of God's being and God's goodness, but what God is and how God is good remain unknown. In making multiple attributions of perfection to God, we are asserting that the perfections we cognize through limited and diverse concepts are unified in a transcendent and unknowable way in God. The referent for all our predications of God is always the same. We need to make the multiple predications on the basis of our incomplete and fragmentary grasp of these perfections as somehow reflecting something of God's being. Such concepts truly point us cognitively in the direction of God, but what makes them true lies beyond their ken. The truth of our judgments somehow surpasses their conceptual content.

Another early and influential emphasis on the trans-conceptual aspect of analogy can be found in Edward Schillebeeckx.[35] While Schillebeeckx did not use the language of judgment, his interpretation of analogy stressed that the mind intentionally projects itself toward God through the horizon opened up by the objective content of the concept: "the typically noetic value of our knowledge of God is thereby situated in a projective act, in which we reach out for God, but do not grasp him in understanding, although we are well aware that he is to be found in the precise direction in which we are reaching."[36] In Schillebeeckx's early metaphysics, the objective dynamism of the concept is rooted in the objective dynamism of reality itself as tending back to its creative source. Since Schillebeeckx's time, the language of tending, striving, and projecting has been explicitly associated with the judgment in analogy. Typical contemporary Thomist accounts of analogy therefore speak of it as a judgment wherein the concept serves as a kind of *point de départ* variously described as opening up a "direction" or a "vector" for an intentional act aiming at the mystery lying at the unknowable asymptotic apex of the cognitive perspective opened up by the concept.[37]

In the end there remains something mysterious about the entire project of explaining analogical judgments. How can we use concepts to explain how we think beyond concepts? How can we explain that when it comes to God, "we can use words not only to say what they mean but also to point beyond what we understand them to mean?"[38] It is precisely these kinds of difficulties which lead many contemporary Thomists to argue that analogy ultimately is not a kind of a scientific theory describing how a philosophical research program aiming at detached theoretical knowledge of God can proceed, but rather an attempt to explain the lived usage of language within a believing religious community. In this

[35] "The Non-Conceptual Intellectual Dimension in our Knowledge of God according to Aquinas," in *Revelation and Theology*, Vol. II, trans. N.D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 157- 206. For analysis and background to Schillebeeckx's view, see Philip Kennedy, O.P., *Deus Humanissimus. The Knowability of God in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, 79-142.

[36] Ibid., 177.

[37] An example of this kind of language can be found in William J. Hill, O.P., *Knowing the Unknown God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), 136-144.

[38] This is how Herbert McCabe describes analogy in "The Logic of Mysticism I" in *Religion and Philosophy*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 31, ed. Martin Warner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56.

interpretation, analogy is rooted in religious experience and religious striving and so partakes of the inherent inadequacy of all language to the mystery of the experience of the Transcendent. This point is nicely made by W. Norris Clarke, in a passage which provides a fitting summation and conclusion to this part of the discussion:

> But note here again that the problem of the extension of religious concepts beyond the range of our experience cannot be solved by logical or conceptual analysis alone, but only by inserting these concepts into the context of their actual living use within the unlimitedly open-ended, supra-conceptual dynamism of the human spirit (intellect and will), existentially longing for a fullness of realization beyond the reach of all determinate conceptual grasp or representation. Thomistic analogy makes sense only within such a total notion of the life of the spirit as a knowing-loving dynamism. The knowledge given by these analogous concepts applied to God, therefore, though extremely indeterminate, is by no means empty. It is filled in by a powerful cognitive-affective dynamism involving the whole of the human psyche and spirit, which starts from the highest point we can reach in our own knowing, loving, joy, etc., from the *best* in us, and then proceeds to project upwards along the line of progressive ascent from lower levels towards an apex hidden from our vision at the line's end. We give significant meaning to this invisible apex precisely by *situating* it as apex of a line of unmistakable direction upward. This delivers us through the mediation (not representation) of the open-ended analogous concept, an obscure, vector-like, indirect, non-conceptual, but recognizably positive knowledge-through-love, through the very upward movement of the dynamic longing of the spirit towards its own intuitively felt connatural good – a knowledge "through the heart" as Pascal puts it, or through "connatural inclination," as St. Thomas would have it.[39]

## III. METAPHORICAL AND RELATIONAL LANGUAGE

The traditional Thomistic preoccupation with analogical language has resulted in a relative neglect of other kinds of religious language. Yet Aquinas also discusses metaphorical and relational language about God, and both categories deserve some consideration because they pose some interesting problems for Thomists. Metaphor emerges as a topic for analysis because it is the predominant mode of discourse about God in Sacred Scripture. The basic problem with metaphorical language about God is that, unlike analogical language, it is inextricably connected to imperfect modes of being:

> Some names signify the kind of perfections which proceed from God to creatures in such a way that the imperfect mode by which the creature participates in the divine perfection is included in the signification of the name,

[39] "Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language about God," in *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 146-7. Clarke acknowledges the seminal work of David Burrell, C.S.C. for helping him to see the centrality of judgment and the actual lived usage of meaning to understanding analogy: *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), Chapter Six.

> as when "stone" signifies a material being; these kinds of names can only be attributed to God metaphorically. However there are other names which signify perfections in an absolute sense without any mode of participation as part of their signification – such as "being," "good," and "living" – and these kinds of names are said properly of God.[40]

So what possible cognitive value could such corporeal imagery have, especially when alternative modes of discourse are available? Or to put the question in a way more like Aquinas himself would have seen it, why would an incorporeal God use corporeal images to reveal his own nature, especially when such imagery would seem to encourage wrong thinking? Aquinas's basic answer to the question is that revelation through metaphor is an accommodation by God to our cognitive status as sense-based knowers.[41] Because all our knowledge begins with the senses, God accordingly reveals himself through corporeal metaphors. And while some people will move from the metaphorical to the analogical, most people are not capable of grasping God in any other way except through metaphor.

While analogical and metaphorical language are alike in that both involve the transfer of a word from its usual or familiar context to an unfamiliar context, nevertheless Aquinas makes a sharp distinction between the two modes of divine discourse.[42] Aquinas holds that while perfections denoted by analogical terms are said to belong first and properly to God, with metaphorical terms it is the opposite because the corporeal character of the form designated by the term means that it belongs first and properly to creatures. This entails that in metaphorical predication about God, neither the *ratio nominis* nor the *res significata* of the term apply truly or properly to the divine nature. When God is described as a "lion," for example, the application of this term to God does not mean that God and lions share a common form according to a single *ratio* (univocity) or that they share in a perfection according to an ordered relationship of causality (analogy). Rather than being based on a common concept of perfection, metaphor is rooted instead in a kind of proportional similitude at the level of effect: "there is no similarity of nature, or in that from which the name is imposed to signify; rather, the thing named metaphorically has a property or effect similar to an effect or property of that which the term properly signifies."[43] "God is a lion" because God brings about his actions boldly in a way that is suggested by a consideration of how a lion acts. "God is a rock" because his actions have the kind of stability and reliability suggested by a rock's properties. By asserting that metaphor is based in similitude, Aquinas is not saying that metaphor reduces to similitude. As William Hill puts it, it is rather that metaphor presupposes a certain similitude between the causalities of Creator and creature that is disclosed in a creative play of the imagination; it does not tell us about God's being but rather "makes possible a knowledge of his

[40] ST I, 13, 3 ad 1.

[41] ST I, 1, 9.

[42] The close affinity between analogy and metaphor is stressed by Ralph McInerny in "Metaphor and Analogy," in his *Studies in Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 67-84.

[43] Ibid., 81.

operations indirectly known through a concept of the appearances and operations of his creatures."[44]

Herbert McCabe has offered a helpful contrast between metaphorical and analogical language through an analysis of the different ways in which they can be subject to negation or qualification. What is said metaphorically of God is quite compatible with its flat denial in the literal sense: "God is a rock" metaphorically speaking is perfectly compatible with the companion denial that God really or literally is a rock. When we say "God is good" analogically, however, this is incompatible with its denial in the literal sense; we mean that God really is good. But God is not good in the same way that we are, so some kind of qualification and distinction must be made regarding how God is good differently (supereminently) from creatures. Metaphorical language, however, does not allow such qualification:

> It is an important point about metaphor that while we can easily say "God is not really a rock" we cannot so safely say "The Lord is not a rock in the way that Gibraltar is." For one thing there is only one way of being a rock, but more importantly, being a rock in the way that Gibraltar is is what the poet has in mind. Unless we think of God as being just like Gibraltar – although of course not really being a rock – we betray the poet's meaning.[45]

The Thomistic account of religious language has typically been criticized for devaluing metaphor in favor of analogy. As we have already seen, Aquinas seems to consider it a kind of condescension to the lowest common cognitive denominator. He implies that our understanding of metaphorical language in scripture should be controlled by what is revealed in more literal passages and by the theological truths enunciated through analogical language. Yet this does not mean that Aquinas thinks that what is true in metaphorical language is simply reducible without remainder to literal expression. There would be something lost in our understanding of God if metaphorical language were to be eliminated in favor of the literal. The same doctrine of creation which undergirds analogy also underwrites metaphor: the God who is somehow disclosed in the perfections of the world is also hinted at in the activities and properties of his material creatures. There are imaginative resonances and insights to be gleaned from metaphor that simply are not present in other modes of discourse. Aquinas himself recognized the way in which the use of multiple metaphors can actually help to safeguard the transcendence of God because a plurality of metaphorical images that are literally incompatible, along with obviously base imagery, can serve as a helpful reminder that God transcends the limits of the human imagination.[46]

Relational predicates like "Creator," "Savior," and "Lord," which designate God on the basis of his relationships to what is not God, pose a peculiar problem for Thomists because they are not essentially and eternally true of God. God "becomes" Creator, Savior, and Lord only on the basis of his creative and redemptive activities. The apparent implication is that God therefore must be

[44] Hill, 140-141.

[45] *Knowing and Naming God*, Volume 3 (q.12-13) of the *Summa theologiae* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 106-107.

[46] ST I, 1, 8 ad 3.

subject to some kind of genuine change or temporal becoming when these relational terms become true about him. Yet this would contradict the doctrines of divine immutability and eternity. Aquinas's solution to the problem of relational predication is designed to show that the activity whereby God brings it about that creatures are really related to him (as created, redeemed, or sanctified) does not involve the introduction of some new actuality in God's own being. Aquinas does this by denying that God's activities *ad extra* put God in a "real relation" to the world. The denial that God is in a "real relation" to the world has been much maligned and misunderstood by non-Thomists, who fail to see the metaphysical point that Aquinas and Thomists are trying to make.[47] Aquinas clearly thinks that God is "related" to the world in the sense that he creates, loves, knows, wills, governs, and redeems the world. The denial that God is "really related" to the world does not undermine any of those claims. It simply denies that God's causal activity, and any relational terms thereby ascribed to him, is on the basis of some alteration in his being. When God acts so as to bring creatures into relationship with him, all of the "happening" is located in creation rather than in God.

In order to understand why Aquinas denies that relational terms introduce novelty or process into God, it is necessary first to say something about his understanding of causality and how it is applied to God.[48] Two basic causal principles are central to the account. The first is that any cause causes precisely insofar as it is in act and that this actuality need not be connected to any prior process in the agent. While our normal experience of causality involves agents who undergo some kind of process as a preparation for their exercise of causality, that prior process is not its causality; indeed, insofar as the cause undergoes some kind of process, it is subject to causality rather than the agent of causality. Because God is pure act, God does not need to undergo any process in order to cause;[49] the infinite and eternal actuality of the divine essence is the single sufficient causal source for all that God does. In contrast to created agents, God's simplicity means that God does not need to actualize a distinct potentiality for action: all God's activity and power are identical with the divine essence.[50] Indeed Aquinas argues that all of God's activity is reducible to and identical with the immanent act of God's knowing and loving. When we describe God's action as transient it is because God's infinite actuality is the source of distinct effects, not because there is some distinct action of God bringing the effects about or because God's own actuality passes into creatures.[51] There is ultimately only one action of God, the eternal immanent act of knowing and loving that is identical with the divine *esse*, that is the single causal origin of everything that ever comes to be. This means that

[47] For a Thomist response to the Process critique of the doctrine, see William J. Hill, "Does the World Make a Difference to God," in his *Search for the Absent God*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 108-119.

[48] See W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "Causality and Time," in *Experience, Existence, and the Good*, ed. Irwin C. Lieb (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), 143-157.

[49] As Brian Davies puts it: "God's bringing things about need be understood only in terms of things coming about, not in terms of things happening at some time in God." *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, New Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 147. See also his "The Action of God," *New Blackfriars* 75 (1994): 76-84.

[50] SCG II, *10* and ST I, 25, 1.

[51] See DP 3, 15 and SCG II, 23 and 31.

God's causality need not be thought of as temporal because there is no succession of distinct causal acts whereby God brings about effects. God's action does not need to occupy temporal locations simultaneous with His effects as if God were like some mundane agent (only invisible and more powerful) who does something new whenever anything happens by His agency; all the novelty, process, and temporality is in the effect, not the cause.[52]

The second causal principle relevant in this context is that causality takes place in the recipient of the action and not in the agent of the action. The activity of the cause and the coming-into-being of the effect is a dynamic unity or a single event that transpires in the effect. The causing and the being caused, the producing and the being produced, are not two separate events, with the former transpiring in the agent while the latter happens in the patient; they are instead ontologically identical and located in the patient. The distinction is a conceptual one, based on differing relations to the agent and the recipient: one and the same effect is designated (1) an *actio* when seen as coming from the agent and (2) a *passio* when seen as occurring in the recipient. This means that when we refer to God as the cause of something temporal, that does not require that God's causal activity itself be temporal. What comes about as an effect of God may be temporal and may involve a process, but that does not require temporality and process in God's causal activity. When we ask the question "When did God do X?" (where X designates some temporal event attributable to God's agency), the answer that is given can only refer to what God brought about (the effect) and not to the eternal act that is its causal origin. Contrary to what is sometimes asserted by Aquinas's critics, there is no reason to assume that God must occupy time in order to produce a temporal effect.[53] As pure act, spirit, and the infinite causal source of all that is, God originates by one eternal act a distinct product, creation, that itself unfolds in succession and time.

With this causal background in place, Aquinas's claim that divine action in the world sets up no real relation in God can be seen for what it truly is: an affirmation of divine transcendence. In denying that relational terms introduce something new into God, Aquinas says:

> Sometimes a relation has a real foundation in only one of the relata while in the other it is based only on the way it is considered. And this occurs when the relata do not belong to the same order. . . . Since God transcends the entire order of creatures, and all creatures are ordered to him but not vice-versa, it is clear that creatures are really related to God but that in God there is no real relation to creatures but rather only in the way that we think of creatures as related to God. And thus nothing prohibits names implying a relationship to creatures from being predicated of God temporally since it is not on the basis of some change in God but rather on the basis of a change in the creature; this is like what happens when we say that the column is now to the right of the animal, not

[52] SCG II, 35.

[53] See the criticisms of Nelson Pike by Stump and Kretzmann in their "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 447-450.

because the column itself has changed, but rather because the animal has moved.[54]

So when we attribute to God such relational names as "Creator," "Lord," and "Redeemer," these terms become true of God *ex tempore* on the basis of God's causal activity. But, as we have already seen, that causal activity is not on the basis of some alteration in God's being and the causation is ontologically located in creation rather than God. Being created and redeemed by God implies a real effect and ongoing causal dependence in the creature, but there is no parallel dependence in God. We think and name God differently on the basis of what God has done vis-a-vis creation, but the new terms do not latch onto something ontologically new in God. As Peter Geach has described it, when God merits a new relational title on the basis of what God has done in creation and redemption, this is only a "Cambridge change" in God rather than a real change in God.[55] A mere Cambridge change in something occurs when something becomes true of it at one time that was not true of it at a previous time, as in Aquinas's example of the column "changing" from being to the left of the animal to being to the right of the animal, without there being any intrinsic alteration in the subject itself but rather a change in something extrinsic to the subject. And so relational terms are properly predicated of God *ex tempore* without any threat to divine transcendence or immutability.

## IV. GOD AND BEING

Amongst all the names by which we know God, that which designates God most truly and properly in his unique reality is derived from the revelation to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3:14: He Who Is or *Qui est*.[56] Aquinas gives three reasons why *Qui est* is the most proper name of God.[57] First, because it signifies *esse* itself and so points to the unique defining feature of God's being: the identity within God of essence and *esse*. Hence the name *Qui est* functions as a shorthand way of referring to the central way in which God the Creator is distinct from every other being. Second, *Qui est* is most proper to God because of its universality. All other names are either less common than being or, if they are coextensive with being like the transcendentals, they add something to being so as to determine or limit the notion. Because God transcends all the determinations of the human mind, the name *Qui est* is most appropriate to God because it signifies no determinate mode of being. Quoting John Damascene, Aquinas says that *Qui est* refers to God as "an infinite and indeterminate ocean of substance." The third reason for the primacy of *Qui est* is that its present tense form is an appropriate indicator of God's eternity: there is no past or future in God.

[54] ST I, 13, 7. For a discussion of relations in Aquinas, see Mark G. Henninger, S.J., *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13-39.

[55] "God's Relation to the World," *Logic Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 321-2.

[56] See Émilie Zum Brunn, "La 'Métaphysique de l'Exode' selon Thomas d'Aquin," in *Dieu et l'être: exégèse d'Exode 3:14 et de Coran 20:11-24*, ed. P. Vignaux et al. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 245-269. See also Etienne Gilson, *Le thomisme*, 99-112.

[57] ST I, 13, 11.

Aquinas adds two important qualifications to the claim that *Qui est* is the most proper name of God in order to safeguard divine transcendence. The first is the reminder that even though we identify God most properly with *esse*, nonetheless we do not know what the divine being is like because our acquaintance with being is exclusively as it is found in creatures. Hence Aquinas says: "Lastly we remove *esse* itself, insofar as it is found in creatures, from God and then the intellect remains in a kind of darkness of ignorance; in what pertains to our wayfaring state, we are best joined to God in that ignorance, as Dionysius says, and this is the kind of darkness in which God is said to dwell."[58] As in the case of the other perfections ascribed to God, we know that it is true that the ultimate perfection of all, *esse* itself, is found in God and indeed is God, but we remain in the darkness of ignorance about how *esse* is found in God.[59]

The second qualification that Aquinas makes about *Qui est* is to say that two other names of God can be seen as having a greater claim to be most proper under different criteria. He argues that from the viewpoint of the origin of the name (*esse*), its mode of signifying (as indeterminate), and its consignification (the present tense "is"), *Qui est* is the most appropriate name of God. When considered from the point of view of the object which the name is designated to signify, however, then the name *Deus* is most proper because it designates the divine nature.[60] But there is a still more appropriate name to designate the divine nature: *Tetragrammaton*. The reason for this is that while *Deus* is reserved properly for the divine nature and is incommunicable to anything else, nonetheless it can be said or thought of what is not God because it is a term designating a nature rather than a personal name designating an individual. The name *Tetragrammaton*, which Aquinas erroneously distinguishes from *Qui est* on the authority of Moses Maimonides, is a personal name designating the unique, incommunicable, and incomprehensible substance of God. As Armand Maurer writes:

> What is this name, so sacred to the Jews, that they hardly dared to pronounce it? The Latin text available to him contains its four Hebrew letters (Yod, He, Vau, He), but this throws no light on the mystery (*secretum spirituale*). If is of so little use to a theologian who wishes to illumine the contents of faith that is is no wonder that it finds small place in St. Thomas's writings. It occurs exactly where it is needed, at the point where he is looking for a personal name of God that is shared by no one else, that has no known etymology, and that is not derived from creatures. Maimonides's description of "Tetragrammaton" answers this description perfectly.[61]

[58] 1 *Sent.* 8, 4, 1 ad 1.

[59] See Joseph Owens, C.S.S.R., "Aquinas—'Darkness of Ignorance' in the Most Refined Notion of God," in *Bonaventure and Aquinas: Enduring Philosophers*, ed. Robert W. Shahan and Francis J. Kovach (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 69-86. On how Aquinas's conception of divine unknowability differs from the Neoplatonic tradition, see Armand Maurer, "*Penitus Manet Ignotum*," *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965): 212-226.

[60] ST I, 13, 8 and 13, 11, ad 1.

[61] "St. Thomas on the Sacred Name 'Tetragrammaton,'" *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972): 75-286.

The ultimate name of God remains a spiritual secret, beyond being itself, that leaves the Holy Mystery intact.

Aquinas's metaphysical consideration of God has been criticized on Heideggerian grounds as a form of onto-theology. The most influential recent accuser of Aquinas in this regard has been Jean-Luc Marion in *Dieu sans l'être: hors-texte*.[62] There Marion argued that by reversing the Pseudo-Dionysian priority of the good over being in his doctrine of the divine names, Aquinas had moved fatally away from the God of revelation and faith, who is fundamentally Love, towards the construction of the metaphysical idol of "God" who would come to dominate modern thought. Marion's original verdict on Aquinas was that he was not significantly different from Avicenna and John Duns Scotus insofar as he accorded primacy to a human concept of being (allegedly tainted with the representational limitations of the imagination) as the horizon which dominates and determines the way in which God can appear; moreover, this conceptual priority could only be univocal and so the alleged Thomistic analogy of being collapses. God is thus objectified and subordinated to human conceptualization, the beginning of the development that would flower into modern onto-theology.

Subsequent dialogue with French Thomists, however, led Marion to modify his assessment of Aquinas. In the 1991 "Preface to the English Edition" of *God Without Being*,[63] Marion held out the possibility that Thomistic *esse* may not be the being from which God needs to liberated, identifying the latter instead with both the conceptually univocal being of modern metaphysics and Heidegger's *Ereignis*. Marion suggested that Thomas does not chain God to metaphysics because the *esse divinum* maintains a transcendent distance from the composed (*esse-essentia*) order of beings that is the subject matter of metaphysics (*ens commune*). Indeed, that distance is so great that there is "hardly" any analogy. Hence Thomas can be considered to be a proponent of God without being when the latter is understood in the sense of *ens commune*. Marion noted at the time that his arguments were only sketchy, however, and many critical questions remained regarding his interpretation of Thomas on such subjects as the nature of metaphysics, the transcendence of the divine *esse*, the analogy of being, and divine causality.

The 1991 arguments are filled out and advanced in his 1994 "*Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théologie*"[64] and a consideration of Marion's deepening appreciation of Aquinas there provides a fitting summation and conclusion to this chapter. Discussion of onto-theology is often muddled by obscurity surrounding the meaning of the term. It therefore comes as something of a relief to find Marion beginning with a clear articulation of the Heideggerian sense of metaphysics as onto-theology in terms of three essential notes. First, God must be conceived as a part of the subject matter of metaphysics, arrived at through an analysis of the particular historical determinations of the Being of beings and grasped through a univocal concept. Second, God must be the efficient causal foundation

[62] (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

[63] Trans. Thomas H. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[64] *Revue thomiste* 95 (1995): 31-66. The entire issue is titled *Saint Thomas et l'onto-théologie* and includes a number of papers on the topic given at a colloquium in 1994. I have commented on the collection in "St. Thomas, Onto-theology, and Marion," *The Thomist* 60 (October, 1996): 617-625. The material here is adapted from that discussion.

(*Begründung*) of beings as their sufficient reason. Third, God as ground must be *causa sui*, supremely grounding precisely because *self*-grounded. Marion's subsequent vindication of St. Thomas amounts to showing that his treatment of God does not embody any of the three constitutive characteristics of onto-theology.

First, Marion shows that Aquinas does not include God within the science of metaphysics.[65] For St. Thomas, the proper subject of metaphysics is *ens commune*. God enters metaphysics' consideration only indirectly, as the *principle* of *ens commune*. Marion argues that Aquinas's clear separation of God from metaphysics' proper consideration of being is a kind of decisive pre-emptive strike against the subsequent scholastic tradition's tendency to bring God back within the bounds of metaphysics and its concept of being; Marion describes that tradition as having received its foundations in Scotus and its most influential modern formulation in Suarez. Marion emphasizes that Aquinas needs to be encountered on his own terms, and so liberated from the prejudiced view that sees him merely as the head of the grand onto-theological metaphysical tradition. It is plain that this emphasis is born of Marion's realization that his earlier account of Aquinas was skewed by his failure in just that regard. The distance between *Dieu sans l'être* and this work can be measured by Marion's greater familiarity with the texts of Aquinas, his careful reading of some of the standard secondary works on Aquinas's metaphysics, and his increased historical knowledge of the subsequent scholastic tradition.

The development in Marion's interpretation can be measured best by his treatment of analogy. Having once impugned the so-called analogy of being, Marion now argues that it is a central reason why Aquinas's position escapes the charge of onto-theology. Marion retracts his earlier charge that *ens* as *primum conceptum* commits Aquinas to an Avicennian-Scotistic univocity of being. Rather, by strictly separating God's existence (*esse divinum*) from creaturely existence (*esse commune*), and marking the distance by the contrast between divine simplicity as the identity of *esse* and *essentia* and created composition as the limitation of *esse* by a distinct *essentia*, Aquinas secures a transcendence of God from the being of metaphysics that rules out any univocal sense of being. This means that there can be no conceptual reciprocity between God and created beings. What relationship there is between God and other beings is an analogical one wherein the *proportio* that allows for a kind of unity is grounded not in a set of relationships to a common concept (as in the Cajetanian view), but rather by a focal reference to a really existing primary term that both transcends and grounds the other analogates.

If analogy is crucial to Aquinas's escape from the first requirement of onto-theology, it seems to come at the price of confirming the second: reducing God to ground *qua* efficient cause/sufficient reason. Yet Marion argues that the causal framework of participation that grounds the analogy of being does not reduce Aquinas's God to a modern onto-theological *Begründung* because Aquinas's understanding of divine causality is normed by creation. The causality of God as Creator is not reducible to mere efficiency and productivity along the lines of the Cartesian *totalis et efficiens causa*. Although Aquinas privileges efficiency, he has

[65] See the discussion of this topic in the previous chapter, pp. 37–38.

a more pluriform and analogous notion of divine creative causality such that it includes formal and final causality and bears no resemblance to mundane making. As *causa essendi*, divine causality exceeds what we can know from its created effects and analogues insofar as the latter remain within the horizon of *ens/esse commune*. One of the most penetrating insights of Marion is that creation is the key to keeping the distance between God and being. Creation implies a unique and transcendent kind of origination that is not locatable within some larger conceptual framework provided by all-encompassing univocal notions of being or causality as in subsequent onto-theological schemas. Given this notion of creative causality, it is clear that Aquinas's God also escapes the third onto-theological requirement of being *causa sui*. It is well known that Aquinas thinks that self-causation of *esse* is incoherent. As the arguments for the existence of God show, causality stops *before* God, not *with* God. Marion notes that it is significant that Aquinas explicitly refuses to submit God to the ultimate metaphysical *a priori* of causality or sufficient reason; this refusal is another way in which Aquinas preemptively distinguishes his position from subsequent onto-theology.

Marion rightly worries, however, that such a defense of Aquinas does not go far enough. Even if Aquinas separates God from the metaphysics of *ens commune*, does he not still submit God to the *horizon* of being even while trying to distance him from being? Is not the entire project vitiated by its subordination of God to the question of being? In opposition to his earlier affirmative answer, Marion now argues that Aquinas separates God from being in a way that sharply distinguishes him both from a modern *metaphysica* with its *conceptus univocus entis* and from Heidegger's understanding of *Sein* or *Ereignis*. Aquinas accomplishes this by refusing to submit God even to *esse* as we know it. While according *esse* a primacy in terms of the divine names, Aquinas does not forget his own distinction between *res significata, ratio nominis*, and *modus significandi*. Our grasp of the divine qua *esse* is not a grasp of the divine nature, which remains a *mysterium tremendum et fascinandum*, since our grasp of *esse* is inescapably rooted in the horizon of *ens commune*. We do not know God because we know created *esse*, since God is not found within the horizon of created *esse*. We can gain no conceptual purchase on the nature of the utterly simple and infinite *esse* of God. Ultimately what *esse* means is determined by divinity in a way that completely surpasses our conceptual ken. Marion argues that Thomas's exegesis of Exodus 3:14 confirms this reading. While *Qui est* is the most proper name of God, it remains only a name. And even *Qui est* must give way to the Tetragrammaton as more proper precisely because it safeguards the singular incommunicability of God.

Marion's basic position is that Thomas's metaphysics escapes onto-theology because it culminates in apophatism. His most controversial claim in this regard is that Aquinas's *esse divinum* should be understood in an exclusively negative sense. Thomistic *esse* should not even be considered within the horizon of traditional metaphysics, but rather taken in a meta-ontological sense. Marion acknowledges that there are numerous texts where Aquinas does identify God with being as *primum ens*, but that these passages need to be read in the light of Aquinas's larger aim to distance God from the being of metaphysics. Marion therefore concludes by arguing that Thomas's apophatic teaching regarding the divine *esse* makes "God Without Being" a thoroughly Thomistic doctrine.

Even if one cannot go all the way down the path that Marion has marked out, as I cannot, his work points out some novel and persuasive lines of vindication for Aquinas. There is no covert Dionysianism here; Marion is not interested in subordinating *esse* to *bonum*. Nor is there covert Heideggerianism here; Marion wants a God without *Sein* or *Ereignis* as well as without onto-theological being. Marion does want to make a Heideggerian end-run around a corrupt metaphysical tradition, but now the latter is more properly interpreted to be the one beginning with Scotus and running through Suarez to Wolff and beyond. If there is something post-modern about Marion's reading of Aquinas, there is also something traditional. Marion's emphasis on the apophatic side of Aquinas involves a conscious attempt to link himself with the kind of Thomism represented most significantly in the twentieth-century by A.-D. Sertillanges[66] and there is some textual warrant for such an interpretation. Marion seems to go beyond even Sertillanges's position, however, in his exclusive emphasis on the *via negativa* at the expense of the *via causalitatis* and the *via eminentiae*. While Marion is right to argue that the apophatic side of Aquinas needs to be retrieved in the light of the Heideggerian critique, he ultimately pushes that interpretation too far. Marion's reading simply cannot be reconciled with what we have seen of Aquinas's position that certain terms can be predicated of God positively and substantially (though non-quidditatively) through analogy. For all of his progress on analogy, Marion still seems somewhat under the spell of Scotus insofar as he continues to construe analogy as an account of how formal concepts can apply to God rather than as an account of the lived use of language in religious affirmations. It is to be hoped that further reading of secondary sources will help Marion to see that Aquinas's confidence in the possibility of positive analogical predication is rooted not in the belief that God can somehow be captured by the concepts involved, but rather in the belief that such judgements really do point us dynamically in the right direction toward the abiding mystery of God.

[66] Marion cites Sertillanges's *La philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Deuxième édition (Paris: Aubier, 1940), 166 and several other texts by the same author in his note 81 on page 62.

# 4. Religion and Science

In the days of Thomas Aquinas, the problem of the relationship between science and religion emerged acutely because of the influx of the full Aristotelian corpus of writings into the West. The central intellectual problem of the day was to determine whether this powerful, systematic, and pagan worldview (comprising what we would now call both philosophy and science) was compatible with the central theological claims of the Roman Catholic Church. *Prima facie*, it did not seem that Aristotelian philosophy was compatible because on at least two key points it held views at odds with the Church: (1) the world had no beginning and (2) individual human beings do not each have intellectual and immortal souls.[1] Thus the most developed science of the time seemed to contradict two central doctrines related to creation and rooted in the book of Genesis: (1) the creation *ex nihilo* of a world with a definite temporal beginning and (2) the special creation of man in the image of God as a rational and spiritual creature. It was one of Aquinas's major intellectual achievements to show that there was no real conflict between Aristotelian science and Christian doctrine. He was motivated by the basic conviction that there could be no genuine contradiction between the proven truths of science and the revealed truths of the faith because both truths ultimately were rooted in God. He showed that Aristotle's arguments for a world without a beginning did not have the force of a fully proven thesis or a demonstration according to the canons of Aristotelian science itself and so were not in direct conflict with revealed truth. Even if they were probative, however, it would still be possible to salvage creation *ex nihilo* because that doctrine is really a claim about the metaphysical relationship between God and the world rather than a scientific claim about the age of the universe.[2] When it came to the problem of the human

[1] It is important here to distinguish between Aristotle and Aristotelianism. While Aristotle himself clearly held the view that the world was eternal, his *De anima* teaching on the human soul is notoriously ambiguous on some central issues like the relationship of *nous* to individual human beings. An excellent overview of the debate about Aristotelianism in Aquinas's day is Fernand Van Steenburghen, *Thomas Aquinas and Radical Aristotelianism* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1980).

[2] See John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Possibility of Eternal Creation," in his *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 191-214 and Wissink, ed., *The Eternity of the World in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas and his Contemporaries* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).

soul, Aquinas argued that a proper understanding of Aristotle's *De anima* did not contradict Christian anthropological doctrines when it was supplemented by a metaphysical account of the direct creation and infusion by God of a spiritual soul into the developing human organism.

While science has come a long way since the time of Aquinas, Thomists would generally argue that the logic of the problem and the major points of issue are still basically the same. First, there is the assumption that there can be no genuine deep inconsistency between the truths established by science and the truths believed in faith because both originate from God. This conviction will be explored in the first part of what follows. Second, scientific findings about the origins and age of the cosmos do not contradict Christian metaphysical convictions about God as Creator. It will be argued in the second part that it is still possible to do natural theology within the context of contemporary cosmology. Third, scientific accounts of the development of human life from sub-human forms do not contradict the Christian account of the special creation and infusion of the human soul by God. Just as Aquinas originally argued that the best naturalistic account of human nature could be made compatible with Christian doctrine when complemented with metaphysical considerations of the need to postulate a transcendent cause of spirit, so too can contemporary evolutionary accounts be reconciled with Christian claims in a similar way; this will be explored in the third part of the chapter.

## I. THE HARMONY OF FAITH AND REASON, THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE[3]

Thomas Aquinas's fullest treatment of the relationship between Aristotelian philosophy and Christian thinking is his *Summa contra gentiles*. At the opening of that work he considers the fundamental nature of the relationship between faith and reason that guides his entire endeavor to appropriate Aristotelianism for the Christian mind, and that still governs Thomistic treatments of the relationship between theology and science.[4] Aquinas begins by distinguishing between truths about God and the world (1) that can only be held by the mind through belief in divine revelation (e.g. the Trinity); (2) that can either be known or believed, but not both at the same time since these epistemic states are incompatible with respect to the same proposition (e.g. that God exists); and (3) that are known through reason alone (e.g. ordinary truths about the world having no direct bearing on salvation and so not revealed by God). He then goes on to argue that the truths that are believed on the basis of divine revelation can never be in contradiction with the truths that can be established by reason. His first major argument for compatibility is as follows:

> But while these aforesaid [revealed] truths of the Christian faith exceed the capacity of human reason, nonetheless they cannot possibly be contrary to the truths that are naturally implanted in us. For what is naturally implanted in us is held to be most true, such that in these cases it is not even possible for us to think of them as false. But neither is it possible for us to think that what we

[3] See the larger account of the relationship between faith and reason in Chapter Two.

[4] See Kenneth J. Konyndyk, "Aquinas on Faith and Science," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 3-21.

> believe by faith could be false, since it is evidently confirmed by God. Accordingly, since only the false is contrary to the true, as is manifest from a consideration of their definitions, it is impossible that those principles that are naturally known by reason could be contrary to the truths of faith.[5]

The basic thrust of the argument is that since both revealed doctrines and natural knowledge are true, they must be compatible because all truths are compatible with each other. What is most notable about this argument is that it presupposes that both scientific knowledge and revealed doctrines make *truth* claims about what is the case in reality, and that all truths claims belong to a single, unified, and internally consistent domain. This rules out the possibility for a contemporary Thomist to try to reconcile the two domains through some version of non-cognitivism (religious and/or science does not make any genuine truth claims) or some kind of compartmentalism (where different frameworks produce different "truths").

Aquinas's second major argument for the compatibility of faith and reason is:

> Whatever is induced in the soul of a learner by a teacher is contained in the knowledge of the teacher, unless the teacher teaches dishonestly, which is impossible for God. The principles that are naturally grasped by our minds are implanted in us by God because God is the author of our nature. Hence such principles are included in divine wisdom. Accordingly, whatever is contrary to principles of this kind is contrary to divine wisdom and cannot be from God. Thus whatever is believed in faith to be revealed by God cannot be contrary to what is known naturally.[6]

What is central to this argument is the claim that all truth ultimately derives from divine wisdom and therefore must be consistent. God's wisdom is the source of revelation as its author and the source of natural knowledge as the creator of our intellects and the sensible natures that the intellect is designed to know. Aquinas presupposes that our cognitive capacities are specifically designed by God to be reliable powers for the attainment of truths about nature.[7] God as author of both our intellects and the world that is their natural field of operation cannot contradict himself by revealing something that conflicts with what we have proven true on the basis of reason.

Aquinas therefore concludes:

> From this it can be gathered that whenever arguments are set down against the teaching of the faith, these cannot be validly derived from the first principles of knowledge naturally implanted in us and known through themselves (*per se*). Hence such arguments cannot have demonstrative force, but rather are only

[5] SCG I, 7.

[6] Ibid.

[7] In contemporary epistemological terms, this makes Aquinas a reliabilist. See Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge," in *Aristotle and His Medieval Interpreters*, ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 17 (1991): 125-158.

> probable reasons or sophistical. And so it remains possible for them to be answered.[8]

Behind these lines, and presupposed by Aquinas's entire treatment of the relationship between faith and reason, is the Aristotelian model of what counts as proven scientific knowledge as articulated in Aristotle's *Organon* and especially the *Posterior Analytics*.[9] Hence a brief account of Aristotelian science is necessary to understand Aquinas's position.

According to the Aristotelian model of a genuine and perfected body of knowledge or science (*episteme* for Aristotle and *scientia* for Aquinas), the premises or first principles of any science are grasped by the mind as a result of induction.[10] On the basis of sense experience, the mind is capable of penetrating to the essential natures of sensible material beings and expressing that knowledge in the form of a definition. Thomists distinguish, however, between different kinds of intellectual awareness of sensible essences and so admit different kinds of definitions. The strongest type of knowledge is a genuine grasp of the formal cause that is expressible in an essential definition. Yet it is often the case that scientific knowledge does not penetrate that deeply, and so the definition must describe the nature on the basis of its properties or accidents. There has been quite a bit of intramural debate among Thomists regarding the relationship between descriptive and essential definitions in natural science.[11] Leaving these controversies to the side, Thomism generally presupposes an ontology of natural kinds and some kind of reliabilism and realism about our native ability to grasp natural kinds intellectually on the basis of sense experience. It is this kind of knowledge that forms the basis for all science because it supplies the premises upon which all subsequent knowledge claims are logically based.

In order to form the basis for scientific knowledge, such premises must embody several criteria: "The premises of demonstrated knowledge must be true, primary, immediate, better known than and prior to the conclusion, which is further related to them as effect to cause."[12] These priority conditions specify the kind of universal knowledge presupposed in the premises of a demonstrative argument. Presuming

[8] SCG I, 7.

[9] A full treatment of the Aristotelian model of science as understood by Aquinas can be found in William A. Wallace, *The Modeling of Nature* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994). The first five chapters of the book discuss the epistemological presuppositions, while the eighth explains the meaning of *scientia* as compared to contemporary models of scientific knowledge. For treatments of Aquinas's notion of scientific knowledge within the categories of contemporary analytic philosophy, see Stump's "Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge"; John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas*, 11-50; 101-128; and Scott MacDonald, "Theory of Knowledge" in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 160-195.

[10] Aquinas presupposes with Aristotle that there are also first principles common to all forms of knowledge, like the principle of non-contradiction.

[11] See Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., "Does Natural Science Attain Nature or Only the Phenomena?" in *The Philosophy of Physics*, ed. Vincent Edward Smith, St. John's University Studies Philosophical Series, Vol. 2 (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961), 63-82. For a contrasting Thomistic view, see Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 173-184; 202-218.

[12] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 71b20-22 as cited in Wallace, 292.

that the premises are in the logical form "All *S* are *P*," what these conditions mean is that there is a universal and convertible connection between the subject and the predicate. All *S's* must necessarily be *P* by their very natures or through themselves (and not on the basis of something else). This relationship is not inferential or mediated, but rather immediate; knowing *S* leads necessarily to grasping its connection with *P*. What is grasped in this way is prior in knowing and in being to what is known inferentially from it. And it is doxastically causal of what is known in the conclusion; that is, in a demonstrative syllogism, the premises express the causes for the belief that the conclusion is true. The doxastic causal structure mirrors the ontological causal structure; our scientific knowledge is based on our grasp of the causal structure of the real, especially through the grasping of formal causes. Thus the logical structure of a full-fledged demonstration is paradigmatically in the form of the classical Aristotelian syllogism:

*All M are P.*
*All S are M.*
*Therefore all S are P.*

Here the conclusion expresses an essential and universal connection of subject and predicate on the basis of some cause or middle term which causally and epistemically binds them together.[13]

With this background in mind, what Aquinas is asserting about the relationship between faith and reason, theology and science, is that it is impossible that there be a conflict between a thoroughly proven or demonstrative scientific claim and a revealed truth. If one were to assert that there were such a conflict, Aquinas would argue that there must be some kind of error in the scientific reasoning. It need not be the case that the reasoning is groundless or sophistical, but rather that it lacks demonstrative status and so is only probable. When it came to the question of the eternity of the world, for example, Aquinas endeavored to show that those on both side of the question erred in claiming demonstrative status for their respective positions; science could not prove either that the world had a beginning or that it did not. Aquinas's position does not eliminate all conflict between faith and science, since it allows for the possibility of conflict between probabilistic scientific claims and faith claims, but it does rule out the possibility of a genuine conflict between faith and fully proven scientific claims.

This basic understanding of the relationship between faith and science still governs the Thomistic position. Thomists presuppose that there cannot be a conflict between faith claims and proven scientific claims. Hence Thomists are not adherents of what Ian Barbour would call the "conflict" model of the relationship

[13] What I have here described is the strongest kind of Aristotelian demonstration where one knows the proper cause of a property's inherence in the subject; this is known as a demonstration of the reasoned fact or *propter quid*. It is also possible to reason from an effect to the existence of its cause in a demonstration of the fact or *quia* demonstration; this is the kind of argument discussed in the treatment of arguments for the existence of God. For more on the various types of demonstration, see Wallace, 292-300.

between science and religion.[14] According to the conflict position, as represented by biblical literalists and scientific materialists, religion and science are irreconcilably opposed to each other because each makes competing truth claims about the basic nature of things. Because Thomists think that both science and religion make truth claims about the real, neither can they adopt the strategy of reconciliation through logical independence or compartmentalism (the second model of Barbour). According to this strategy, science and religion can never truly conflict because they have separate domains of inquiry, frames of reference, and methodologies. The price for this peace, however, is a reinterpretation of the cognitive value of both faith and science; either one or both (usually theology) is reduced to non-cognitive status or both become true in the diminished sense of "relative to a reference frame or language-game." Because Thomists are committed to realistic truth claims in both science and religion, they treat the relationship between the two domains according to logical compatibility or incompatibility. Scientific truth claims may either support or conflict with religious truth claims. This means that Thomists are committed to what Barbour would categorize as a model of either dialogue between science and religion or integration of science into theology; as will be explored in what follows, most Thomists are inclined to the former, while some Thomists prefer the latter.

Regardless of whether dialogue or integration is the strategy, Thomists assume that any apparent conflict between contradictory truth claims in science and theology can be dissolved through a careful analysis of both modes of reasoning. It may be the case that the scientific claim is badly grounded and so there is no real source of conflict. What is more likely, however, is that the scientific evidence is not demonstrative but only probable; in this case there would still be a conflict, but it would no longer be crisis-inducing because it would not be between two competing and fully warranted truth claims. While Aquinas's own stance seems to imply that the error would always be on the scientific side, the basic Thomist position allows for the possibility that an apparent conflict could be resolved by a re-interpretation of a theological claim when the scientific claim does have demonstrative force or even great probability. If a scientific claim had demonstrative force and conflicted with a theological claim, then the theological claim would have to be re-interpreted in such a way as to make it compatible with science. Since theology is itself a highly ramified science with a logical structure, it may be the case that there is some error in its deductive reasoning or even in its premises. For example, it might be the case that its interpretation of the meaning of Scripture might have to be re-thought in the light of scientific evidence. As we will see in the sections that follow, the theological import of the book of Genesis has had to be re-thought in the light of modern science.

As Kenneth Konyndyk has pointed out, this approach to the reconciliation of science and faith gives no assurance that the source of apparent conflict can be readily identified:

[14] I am adopting the schema for classifying the basic possibilities for relating science and religion from Ian Barbour's seminal *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 77-105.

> . . . [Aquinas] thinks foundationally, and therefore he thinks that any alleged perspectival difference will cash itself out as an incompatibility somewhere down the line. Once this happens, we will have to go back and see whether we can isolate the source, a possibly daunting task. If a science is incomplete, that is, if we are unable to make explicit its foundational structure from top to bottom, we may find it impossible to get to the bottom of some incompatibilities. . . Assuming that the sciences (both the science of theology and the other sciences) are fairly complicated, there is no easy assurance that if an incompatibility showed up, that it could be tracked down very quickly or easily. Aquinas's position does not assure us of quick or easy answers. But he does insist that a Christian must hold that there is a compatibility at bottom; we cannot accept the possibility that there might be two truths incompatible with each other.[15]

Any conflict between science and religion will require a case-by-case consideration of the relevant scientific claims and theological claims with all their background presuppositions. Such a process would involve both theologians and scientists dialoguing together about the nature of their claims and the evidence for them. The conflict might not be resolved to either party's satisfaction. So the Thomist position is not that all conflict is resolvable, but rather that any conflict between science and religion could never take the form of a fundamental conflict between basic revealed truths or valid theological conclusions derived from such truths in opposition to demonstratively proven scientific truths. That kind of conflict is ruled out *a priori* on the basis of God's ultimate authorship of revelation, nature, and the human mind.

Konyndyk endorses Aquinas's claim that since all truth is one and unified, scientific truth and theological truth must be logically compatible. Yet he argues that it is undermined by "an unacceptable epistemology and an antiquated view of the sciences."[16] His argumentation for this claim is admittedly sketchy and incomplete; he acknowledges that he is not a proper philosopher of science. While a full defense of the contemporary viability of Thomistic epistemology and philosophy of science is beyond the bounds of this exposition, it must be noted that such a defense has been offered in William A. Wallace's *The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis*. As the subtitle indicates, Wallace's book represents an attempt to argue that a proper understanding of the philosophy of science requires a recovery of a philosophy of nature of a broadly Aristotelian kind insofar as it presumes the reality of such basic concepts as cause, substance, power, etc. As the main title indicates, Wallace believes the best way to make such concepts intelligible to a contemporary audience is through the use of models and analogies. Wallace's book represents the culmination of a long Thomistic pre-occupation in this century with the defense of a traditional philosophy of nature in the face of modern science and philosophy of

[15] "Aquinas on Faith and Science," 11-12.

[16] Konyndyk, 17. He also objects on Calvinist grounds that Aquinas is too optimistic about human cognitive abilities.

science.[17] Indeed, it is precisely concern with that issue that explains the relative paucity of Thomistic treatments of the relationship between science and religion. Yet while Wallace's work does not explicitly address the relationship between science and religion, his work is directly relevant to some of the claims advanced in this section insofar as he shows that the hypothetical-deductive model of reasoning commonly presupposed in contemporary science is a form of probabilistic reasoning according to both its own self-understanding and the canons of Aristotelian science.[18] What this means for the science-religion dialogue is that there is little grounds for a crisis kind of conflict between science and religion because most scientific theories are not demonstratively established. This is not to say that there is no conflict worth worrying about; the problem of the science-religion relationship cannot be solved by disparaging the cognitive value of scientific claims any more than it can be solved by disparaging the cognitive value of religious claims. It is rather to say that because of the provisional or probabilistic status of many scientific claims, religious believers should not too quickly assume that science conflicts with faith. Whenever there is a *prima facie* conflict, it is necessary to consider both the status of the scientific claim and the real meaning of the doctrine with which it is alleged to conflict; this is where dialogue is essential.

It is worth noting that the Thomistic view of the relationship between faith and reason is authoritative within Roman Catholicism and still governs the Church's thinking on the relationship between science and theology.[19] When discussing the lessons that the Roman Catholic Church needs to learn from the notorious Galileo case, Pope John Paul II articulates a nuanced statement of the relationship between science and faith that presupposes the Thomistic view that they cannot be fundamentally opposed because of the unity of truth.[20] At the heart of the Galileo case was the mistaken belief that heliocentrism was a revealed truth of Scripture, entailing that the Copernican theory must be false. As the Pope notes, Galileo himself was paradoxically more perceptive than the theologians opposing him in recognizing the distinction between the inerrancy of Scripture itself and the fallibility of its human interpreters. The Pope recalls the reasoning of St. Augustine about reconciling Scripture and scientific reason:

> If it were to happen that the authority of Sacred Scripture be set in opposition to clear and certain reasoning, this would mean that the person reading Scripture does not understand its meaning. It would not be the meaning of Scripture, which the alleged interpreter does not understand, which is opposed to truth, but

[17] The most notable effort in that regard is that of Jacques Maritain. For an overview, see Yves Simon, "Maritain's Philosophy of Science," *The Thomist* 5 (1943): 85-102. For a catalogue of the various schools of thought within Thomism regarding natural philosophy and its relationship to other disciplines, see Benedict Ashley, O.P., "The River Forest School and the Philosophy of Nature Today," in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Honor of James A. Weisheipl, OP*, ed. R. James Long, Papers in Mediaeval Studies 12 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991), 1-15.

[18] Wallace, 238-279.

[19] The recent papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* makes this clear.

[20] "Lessons of the Galileo Case," *Origins* 22:22 (November 12, 1992), 369-374.

> rather what the interpreter has himself imputed into Scripture that is opposed to the truth.[21]

As Ernan McMullin has noted, Augustine's principle that if there is a conflict between a literal reading of Scripture and a well-founded scientific truth, then the interpretation of Scripture must be altered is remarkable for allowing reason and science a role in determining the proper sense of Scripture.[22]

The pope therefore argues that theologians have an obligation to keep themselves informed of scientific advances in order to examine whether such advances necessitate theological revisions. The pope does not require that the scientific thesis in question have absolute demonstrative certainty, but rather be solidly grounded such that "it would be imprudent and unreasonable to reject it."[23] The very purpose of the establishment of the Pontifical Academy of Science, whose members come from all different faiths, is to advise the Church on what is well-grounded science. Sometimes the alleged conflict can be resolved by the realization that the conflicting scientific thesis is not well-established. The pope notes that sometimes the apparent conflict results from the failure of one or both of the disciplines of science and theology to stay within their competencies:

> The birth of a new way of approaching the study of natural phenomena demands a clarification on the part of all disciplines of knowledge. It obliges them to define more clearly their own field, their approach, their methods, as well as the precise import of their conclusions. In other words, this new way requires each discipline to become more rigorously aware of its own nature.[24]

Conflicts often arise because either science or theology makes claims that go beyond its proper evidence. This happens when scientists, for example, make reductive or materialistic claims on the basis of scientific evidence, or when they argue that only empirically-based truth claims in accord with scientific canons are valid; in both cases, scientific evidence is used to advance broader philosophical claims of a metaphysical or epistemological variety. On the other hand, theologians can and historically have erred by reading Scripture as if it were meant to be the source of truth about the physical world. In adjudicating between competing claims, philosophy has a crucial role of clarifying and mediating between the disciplines of science and religion. The pope notes with sadness that the Galileo case has resulted in a myth about the fundamental opposition between faith and science, when in fact it was a case of "tragic mutual incomprehension." In the sections that follow, we shall see the Thomistic methodology at work in relating

[21] *Epistula* 143, n. 7; *Patrologia Latina* 33, col. 588. I have revised the translation in the *Origins* text, 372.

[22] Ernan McMullin, "Natural Science and Belief in a Creator," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, ed. Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and George Coyne, S.J. (Vatican: Vatican Observatory, 1988), 57.

[23] "Lessons of the Galileo Case," 373. It is worth remembering that Galileo was unable to provide demonstrative proof of the truth of the Copernican hypothesis.

[24] Ibid., 372.

theological truth claims to scientific claims in a way designed to save the unity of truth through a careful consideration of the claims of both disciplines.

## II. GOD AND COSMOLOGY: IS NATURAL THEOLOGY STILL VIABLE?

Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God share a common logical structure: they begin with an appeal to some empirical feature of the sensible world, then argue that that feature requires some kind of causal explanation, and then conclude that some ultimate proper cause of that effect must exist that is identifiable with God. In the course of these arguments, Aquinas presupposes the concepts and findings of natural philosophy such that even though the arguments conclude to something that lies beyond nature (and hence are metaphysical in their conclusions), nevertheless they presuppose and integrate into their analyses the truths of nature as known by natural philosophy. Hence Aquinas is an example of what Barbour would call the *integration* approach to the relationship between science and religion; according to this approach, theology integrates into its reasoning the findings of science.[25] Specifically, theology's attempt to show rationally that God is the first cause and creator of the world through a cosmological argument presupposes and integrates into its approach the truths of the cosmos as known scientifically. Aquinas's arguments were able to do that in his day, but the momentous changes in scientific outlook since the thirteenth century have raised serious doubts about the contemporary viability of integrative Thomistic cosmological arguments for God as First Cause.

If Thomistic cosmological arguments are to retain their traditional grounding in natural philosophy, then the basic concepts of that natural philosophy presupposed by the cosmological arguments have to be defended in the light of modern science. So while no Thomist would defend the Aristotelian cosmos, there are those who would argue that the basic principles of Thomistic natural philosophy are still valid. Central to that case would be a rehabilitation of the Aristotelian doctrine of causality, which is obviously presupposed by the world-as-effect to God-as-cause style of argumentation. As noted in the previous section, William A. Wallace, O.P. has mounted a vigorous defense of Thomistic natural philosophy in *The Modeling of Nature* and authored a penetrating Thomistic analysis of the history of causality.[26] While this larger question of the viability of Thomistic natural science cannot be addressed here, nonetheless it is instructive to look at the places where modern science and Thomistic arguments for the existence of God seem to come into sharp conflict. Aquinas considered the argument from motion to be the most "manifest" of the many arguments he offered for God's existence, and he thus gave it pride of place in the *Summa theologiae* I, 2, 3; it is also the argument that is the most developed in his entire corpus in *Summa contra gentiles* I, 13. Hence this argument has always been central in traditional Thomistic presentations. Yet it has also seemed most vulnerable to criticism based on modern science and this vulnerability has seemed to discredit the entire Thomistic project of proving the

[25] Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 98.

[26] *Causality and Scientific Explanation*, Two Volumes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972, 1974.)

existence of God. Hence there is warrant for a brief consideration of the argument for the limited purpose of considering its viability in the light of modern science.[27]

The proof in question begins with an empirical appeal to the evident fact that there are things in motion around us. While there is some debate about the exact meaning of "motion" in the argument,[28] in this context it is enough simply to take motion to mean any change in a sensible being wherein it moves from potentially being *x* to actually being *x* (or vice-versa), and where that change is a real change in the being rather than some relational change or "Cambridge" change. Aquinas uses the example of wood becoming hot because of being brought into contact with fire. In order to explain how something changes from potency to act in some respect, it is necessary to appeal to a cause in act in the relevant sense. Hence the central premise of the argument: whatever is moved must be moved by another. A motion is therefore by definition an effect requiring some cause. Aquinas offers two arguments in support of the principle. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas argues for the principle on the basis of his analysis of act and potency. Before the motion begins, the subject in question is only potentially *x* and not actually *x*. In order to explain the process of becoming actually *x*, something else with the actual capacity for bringing about *x* must be invoked. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, he argues for the principle based on the nature of matter itself.[29] Aquinas knew of at least three obvious counter-examples to the principle that whatever is moved is moved by another. First, there are animate beings who move themselves by locomotion. He would argue, however, that there is no real violation of the principle because the soul acts as mover to the body as moved. The second apparent counter-example would be a falling body. Aquinas would explain such a motion as a natural motion proceeding from a principle intrinsic to a body, but still requiring an appeal to an extrinsic moving cause as Author of Nature. Finally, when it comes to projectile motion, Aquinas would argue that it requires a causal appeal to a projector who imparts a power or force in the medium to move the projectile. The basic soundness of these latter two explanations in the light of modern science has been defended by Wallace and James Weisheipl.[30]

Yet there is a powerful counter-example that Aquinas could not have foreseen in Newton's first law of motion:

> According to Newton's first law of motion, a body in uniform rectilinear motion will continue in motion indefinitely unless acted upon by an external force. But

[27] See Chapter Eight, 179–187, on the nature of God for a broader consideration of Thomistic arguments for the existence of God.

[28] See David Twetten, "Clearing a 'Way' for Aquinas: How the Proof from Motion Concludes to God" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Supplement 70 (1996): 259-278.

[29] For an analysis and defense of this argument in the light of modern physics, see Richard F. Hassing, "Thomas Aquinas on *Phys.* VII.1 and the Aristotelian Science of the Physical Continuum," in *Nature and Scientific Method*, ed. Daniel Dahlstrom, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, v. 22 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 109-156.

[30] William A. Wallace, O.P., "Newtonian Antinomies against the Prima Via" in his *From a Realist Point of View* (Washington, D.C. : University Press of America, 1979), 329-370. Wallace, "Aquinas and Newton on the Causality of Nature and God: The Medieval and Modern Problematic," in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, 255-279. See James A. Weisheipl, *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages*, ed. William E. Carroll (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985).

> such a body is sufficiently moved by its own inertia and does not require an external mover. Therefore it is not true that whatever is moved is moved by another, and thus the proof for God's existence based on this principle is rejected.[31]

In the words of Anthony Kenny: "it seems that Newton's law wrecks the argument of the First Way."[32] Wallace argues, however, that a careful consideration of the meaning and implication of the principle of inertia does not undermine the first way. He begins by noting that the principle is neither self-evident nor demonstrable. It is verified only in a limit situation that cannot actually exist because it abstracts from all the extrinsic causal factors (resistance, friction, the influence of other bodies, etc.) influencing motion in the physical universe that make it impossible for a body actually to achieve uniform motion on its own. Paradoxically, in the real world any motion that would be exactly uniform would require an extrinsic mover in order to explain it. Insofar as Newtonian laws stay at the level of mathematical formulation and abstract from physical conditions, they do not provide a causal explanation of actual physical motion. Any particular instance of physical motion in the universe still does require some kind of extrinsic causal source to explain it.

Supposing this to be true, the first way then goes on to argue that the causal explanation of motion requires the existence of a mover that is itself unmoved because recourse to a series of moved movers cannot give an ultimate explanation for motion. A moved mover is a cause that requires a prior cause to explain its own exercise of causality; it is a cause that can only operate in dependence on some other cause. Because there cannot be an infinite series of caused causers, there must be a first unmoved cause who is God. Now there are philosophical objections to the claim that there cannot be an infinite series of moved movers,[33] but in this context what is under consideration is whether this claim is compatible with modern science. Kenny would argue that it is not because it trades upon an outdated medieval cosmology where the lines of causality flow down from the *primum mobile* or outermost sphere, through various internesting celestial spheres, until finally eventuating in some change in the terrestrial arena. Such a picture of mechanical moving causes, like a big series of falling dominoes, raises problems about time lapses because it would appear that motion is like some impulse that travels from body to body from the top down.[34] This results in a picture of God's causality as indirect and mediated. Yet this is not what Aquinas has in mind, for God is not situated at some spatial limit of the universe, but rather acts directly everywhere within it as undergirding all creaturely exercises of causality.[35] Aquinas's God is not a Deist God who sets only the initial causal conditions which then are sufficient to explain all the events of the universe, but rather the creator who is intimately and immediately involved in all causation.

[31] 351.
[32] *The Five Ways* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 28.
[33] See p. 183.
[34] See Wallace, "Aquinas and Newton," 275-276.
[35] See ST I, 105. See the discussion of conservation in Chapter Eight, pp. 185–187.

While Wallace and his fellow River Forest Thomists tried to save the connection between natural philosophy and science in the proofs for the existence of God, most twentieth-century Thomists have simply retreated to a metaphysical view of the cosmological arguments which renders them immune from being undermined by modern science. By abandoning the natural or physical domain, they neutralized any possible scientific objection; at the same time, however, they gave up the possibility of arguing from nature in a recognizably scientific sense. In commenting on the first way, Etienne Gilson said: "we today are so far removed from the universe of the Greeks that to start from the physical framework of such a universe in order to prove anything is to disqualify the whole argument at the very outset."[36] Hence Gilson interprets the starting point of the argument as the very existence of change. Now the explanandum is a metaphysical reality off the map of a scientist seeking to explain physical motion: the very *esse* or to-be of change. The advantage of this strategy is that "the first way becomes independent of any scientific hypothesis as to the structure of the universe."[37] The reconciliation of science and religion is thus brought about by carefully separating science's proper field of inquiry from that of philosophy and theology:

> The object of science is to describe the world of change, or motion, such as the scientist finds it and, as the saying goes, to discover its "laws." For this reason a scientist is well founded in saying that, precisely *qua* scientist, he has no obligation to ask about the existence of God. But science is far from constituting the totality of the knowledge accessible to the mind of any man, even to the mind of a scientist. The problems that escape the grasp of the methods used by the mathematical and experiential sciences do not cease to exist merely because they are not susceptible of scientific solutions. This is particularly true of the present problem. For science is not competent to deal with the origin of the universe whose nature it investigates; science simply takes the existence of the world for granted. Nevertheless the existence of a world of change is in itself a problem, and it is up to the metaphysician to formulate the problem, to discuss it, and to solve it.[38]

Hence according to this way of thinking, God is required to explain the sheer existence of a world which admits of a scientific explanation. By focusing attention on God's unique creative and conserving causality of existence, God is given an ongoing role in the cosmos on a deeper or more fundamental level than what is explored by science.

Ernan McMullin has argued for the adoption of this approach for reconciling belief in a Creator with natural science and traced its historical roots back to St. Augustine:

> What Augustine effectively did was to distinguish between two orders of cause and explanation; each is complete in itself, but each also complements the other

[36] *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), 60
[37] Ibid., 67.
[38] Ibid., 67.

> in a distinctive way. His way of reaching to God is not through gaps in the natural order, through the inability of natural science to explain certain phenomena. God is "cause", not as part of the natural order, not as intervening here and there to bring things about that would otherwise not happen, but as a primary creative cause of the entire natural order, as the agent responsible for its existence and its entire manner of being. It is one thing to call on God who alone builds and governs creatures from the summit, Augustine reminds us; it is quite another thing to explain why things happen in the way in which they do in the natural order. For this, it is sufficient to refer to the capacities that God has woven into the texture of the world from its first appearance.[39]

As indicated by the contrast with the "God of the gaps" approach, McMullin proposes a return to Augustine as an alternative to what he calls the physico-theology or deistic approach that posits God as the ultimate explanation for some gap in the scientific theory. As McMullin tells the story, such gaps have a history of disappearing and thereby eliminating God from the cosmos; moreover, the attributes of a God thus posited seems to bear little resemblance to the God of revelation. McMullin proposes instead that theologians see scientific explanations as complete in their own order apart from any appeal to God. God does not enter into the explanatory picture to explain any properly scientific fact, but rather as the ultimate explanation for why there exists any universe for the scientist to study in the first place: "The appeal is not to a 'gap' in the scientific explanation but to a different order of explanation that leaves scientific explanations intact, that explores the possibility for there being *any* kind of specific explanation."[40] The advantage of this sort of parsing of the science-religion problem is that it permanently defuses the conflict by separating the two domains into the physical and the metaphysical. Yet as McMullin points out, the disadvantage is that "we may be left without an argument for God's existence of the kind that would convince a science-minded generation. God does not *seem* to make a difference, not at least of the sort that science can deal with on its own terms."[41] It is precisely for this reason that the River Forest Thomists resist the urge to adopt a metaphysical approach divorced from nature. Yet it has largely won the day among Thomists, many of whom have been influenced by Gilson's approach. There is something ironic about this, however, since as McMullin points out, Aquinas himself was determined to ground his arguments in the science of his day.

Perhaps the best example of a contemporary Thomistic treatment of these issues can be found in W. Norris Clarke's essay on "Is Natural Theology Still Possible Today?" that was originally published in the same collection of papers on science and theology as McMullin.[42] Clarke begins by noting that contemporary science and natural theology are on better terms now because they offer compatible rather

[39] "Natural Science and Belief in a Creator: Historical Notes," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, ed. Robert J. Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and Georges Coyne, S.J. (Vatican: Vatican Observatory, 1988), 58-59.

[40] Ibid., 74.

[41] Ibid.

[42] However I am going to refer to the later version that appears in his *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, Person*, 150-182.

than competing or closed hypotheses. It is important to note, however, that logical compatibility is different from entailment. Clarke argues that while contemporary science is compatible with theistic claims, it is no way entails, establishes, or even authorizes them. Following McMullin's lead, Clarke rejects any attempt to appeal to the existence of God in order to explain some gap within the web of scientific explanation. In the contemporary arena, the two tempting gaps for God to fill are the origin of the cosmos according to Big Bang theory and the origins of the fine-tuning of the cosmos with respect to the conditions for human life; since science does not yet have credible explanations for either, many theists have argued that God is the explanation for the scientific gap. Yet Clarke asserts that it would be unwise to bring God into the breach because "the 'God of the gaps' has so often been put out of the job in the past that I think he should be, for the time being if not permanently, retired." Instead, "only a radically metaphysical argument, from the very existence of any determinate world at all, or from the existence of some dynamic order at all, has a fair chance of succeeding, as I see it."[43]

According to Clarke, the gap of intelligibility that God is meant to fill lies at the level of metaphysics rather than science. God is not needed to explain the workings of the natural order, but the sheer existence of a world with a natural order. God explains why there is an ordered world at all, rather than why it has the order that it has. Clarke offers four different broad cosmological arguments for the existence of God. The first three are variations on the traditional cosmological arguments for the necessity of an infinite, unique, and self-sufficient being in order to explain a universe of finite, dependent beings in accord with some version of the principle of sufficient reason. In this context what is important is the relationship of this kind of argumentation to science. On the one hand, Clarke wants his argument to be "a purely metaphysical one, quite independent of any changes or progress in the content of the sciences."[44] On the other hand, however, he wants the metaphysical inquiry to be seen as compatible with and indeed a continuation of scientific inquiry:

> It is noteworthy, too, that the whole process of scientific inquiry implicitly reaffirms the philosophical claim that our finite universe as it manifests itself to us does not contain within it the sufficient reason for its own existence in this particular way, is not self-explanatory. For at each stage of explanation, science keeps raising new questions why the system should be such – which is an implicit admission that it is not self-explanatory. It keeps seeking for the ideal goal of a single ultimate unifying principle from which all else may be derived and a principle that is as simple as possible. But is not this an implicit admission that, as long as we remain with some determinate complexity, we have not yet reached the end of the line in intelligibility? No finite determinate mode of being, that is *this* and not *that*, can ever be ultimately self-explanatory. Only an unqualifiedly infinite fullness of existence can ever be the final resting place of the search for intelligibility. Science itself cannot formulate this last step of its search, for there is no scientific way of giving meaning to it or solving it in

[43] Ibid., 152.
[44] Ibid., 169.

> terms of scientific data or empirical verification. This is precisely where science points the way toward metaphysics as the next stage of the journey toward the fullness of meaning of our always question-laden universe.[45]

So metaphysics concludes the human quest for intelligibility begun by science. No matter what science concludes about the determinacy of the universe, it can never explain the ultimate grounds of its existence. Metaphysics picks up where science must end according to its own principles.

When it comes to teleological arguments, however, Clarke thinks that there is a much closer connection between science and theology that makes this continue to be the most efficacious way to argue for the existence of God. Aquinas's own fifth way appealed to the end-directness of natural processes as evidence for Mind. According to the original argument, whenever there is a natural process that regularly unfolds in order to realize a future state of perfection, a transcendent mind is necessary to explain how what is not yet actually existing can effectively guide the process as it moves from potentiality to actuality. Clarke argues that this approach is still viable in the light of Darwinian evolutionary theories of random genetic mutation if it is taken to be based not on the evolution of species by design, but rather on the "great underlying physico-chemical laws of the universe that in fact remain stable throughout all the evolutionary development of living organisms, as the necessary permanent matrix of order upon which the latter build."[46] The chance at work in random genetic mutation itself presupposes a stable ordering of the more basic laws of science. Clarke argues that the argument from design is still viable precisely because whenever there is a dynamically ordered system like our cosmos, mind is necessary as the ultimate explanation for order. Since no one element in the order is the proper explanation of the order itself, mind is the only possible explanation. The unity of an all-inclusive order demands a sufficient reason that can only be a transcendent Mind. Clarke offers two arguments in support of a divine Mind as the source of the order of the cosmos. First:

> These overarching laws of reciprocal interaction are each a one-over-many, gathering many different elements into an intelligible unity that is system-wide, yet without collapsing together the real distinctness and separation in space and time of each element. This is a space-and-time transcending unity that can only be constituted by an idea – which in turn can only be generated by a mind. Such a unity of many in one, leaving intact the distinction of each, is almost a definition of an idea. And an idea must originate from a mind.[47]

The second reason is that the only metaphysical principle which explains how the elements will interact is a Mind that is metaphysically prior to the unfolding in time of the elements. Again, it is the very definition of mind that it functions to order present elements with respect to future unity or order. Since the order to be

[45] Ibid., 169-170.
[46] Ibid., 173.
[47] Ibid., 174.

explained here overarches all of space and time, the Mind in question has to be immaterial, infinite, and eternal, and so transcend the order it explains. It must be stressed, however, that this kind of a teleological argument does not depend on any particular scientific theory of order; in this sense it cannot be undermined by changes in scientific theory. Presuming that science will eventually result in ever greater unification in its own account of order in the cosmos, nonetheless there will always be room to postulate Mind as the ultimate explanation: "any determinate dynamic order at all, whether primal in itself or originating from some previous physical energy state, must be grounded ultimately in a ordering Mind transcending the system itself."[48]

In conclusion, it would seem that the trend in Thomism is away from a model of integration of science towards a model of what Barbour would call "dialogue."[49] According to this view, there is a kind of independence between science and religion insofar as each operates within different domains: the physical and the metaphysical. There is no strong logical connection between the two domains, but rather a loose compatibility or consonance. Science has its own autonomy and completeness in itself without any recourse to God in its explanatory schema. Theistic claims have to respect scientific claims and adjust themselves to those claims by being carefully metaphysically immune; theists must not rest their claims for God on strictly scientific facts, but rather upon metaphysical claims that go beyond the bounds of science. Scientists, in their side of the dialogue, have to be careful not to advance metaphysical claims. As long as both sides stay within their proper boundaries, there will be no conflict between science and religion.

## III. EVOLUTION AND CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY: RAHNER ON THE SCIENCE-RELIGION DIALOGUE[50]

The clearest proponent of the dialogue model within twentieth-century Thomism is the transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner.[51] Rahner's mature views are on display in an essay entitled "Natural Science and Reasonable Faith."[52] His position rests on the following general principle: "Theology and natural science cannot in principle contradict one another since both *right from the outset* are distinct from one another in their area of investigation and in their methodology."[53] Rahner explains:

> Natural science investigates in a posteriori experience individual phenomena which human beings (ultimately through the experience of their senses) encounter in their world, and the relationship of these phenomena to one

[48] Ibid., 176.

[49] Barbour, 90-93.

[50] For background on Rahner, see p. 14 and 166–178.

[51] The other great figure in Transcendental Thomism, Bernard Lonergan, has written much about science and theology, but his interest is more in their epistemological-methodological interface than in adjudicating their apparent disputes regarding competing claims. For some reflections on Lonergan and science, see Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., "Lonergan: Emergent Probability and Evolution," *Continuum* 7 (1969): 131-142 and James R. Pambrum, "Philosophical Foundations of Theological Attitudes toward Science," *Église et théologie* 18 (1987): 29-53.

[52] *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 21, trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 16-55.

[53] Ibid., 19. Emphasis in original

> another. Theology has to do with the totality of reality as such, and with the ground of this reality, and its method is ultimately one of a priori questioning. Consequently, there need be no fear of a conflict of competence between natural science and theology, provided that neither acts contrary to its own nature when crossing the other's boundaries, and provided that, when such unintentional violations do occur, they inform one another of them.[54]

Theology deals with God as the one, absolute, and transcendent ground of all reality; as such, God cannot be an object of a posteriori experience, and so God cannot be the object of scientific inquiry. The transcendental anthropology that is the basis for Rahner's theology is something beyond any finding of empirical anthropology: "when and to the extent that theology contains, at least as one essential element, the transcendental and a priori relationship to the original one and whole, then it is from its very outset essentially distinct from natural science and is, therefore, not subject to its judgment."[55] Theological formulations are not statements of empirical fact, but inherently feeble attempts to thematize the transcendental experience of Absolute mystery as the ground of human subjectivity in knowledge and freedom. Science, by contrast, deals with particular phenomenal facts capable of formulations admitting of empirical verification without any reference to the ultimate ground of the whole; indeed, according to Rahner, science should operate with a kind of "methodological atheism."

This way of formulating the relationship between science and religion brings Rahner close to Barbour's category of independence, where the two domains are separated by different methods and domains of inquiry so as to rule out any real conflict and any real dialogue. Yet Rahner's account does not allow for a strict separation and indeed requires dialogue for two reasons, one positive and the other negative. The positive reason lies in the unity of human subjectivity beyond the fragmentation and pluralization of human knowing into distinct sciences. Insofar as a person inquiring into any one branch of science has interests beyond that branch with which he seeks to integrate his findings as a scientist, he will seek to dialogue with others engaged in scientific enquiry, including theologians. In that case, what occurs is not really so much an "interdisciplinary dialogue" as a dialogue between different knowing subjects seeking some kind of unity for their own knowing.[56] The scientist may also be a believer, and the believer may also be a scientist. Hence there must be a dialogue between science and religion with the presupposition that there can be no ultimate conflict, even if complete reconciliation is an asymptotic goal of human knowing.

The more likely source of dialogue, however, is negative conflict rooted in what Rahner calls "gnoseological concupiscence." The notion of concupiscence, traditionally a term describing the inability of human beings to control their passions as a result of the Fall, is extended by Rahner to describe the inability of human beings to rein in their knowledge claims; since both desire and intelligence

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 23. See also "Theology and the Contemporary Sciences," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 23, 94-102.

[56] This point is made in "Theology as Engaged in an Interdisciplinary Dialogue with the Sciences," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 13, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 80-93.

are rooted in the one subject, it is not surprising that both domains tend to strive for more than is their due. Practitioners of one science have a proclivity to claim more than is warranted by their proper sphere; there is an aggressive tendency to monopolize, totalize, and reduce the plurality of human knowing into the perspective of the science of the practitioner: "every science as such regards itself as autonomous, and yet, in view of the unity of human knowledge, is secretly convinced of the fact that man has only to pursue his own scientific investigations at a sufficiently radical level to be able to identify them with the totality of human knowledge."[57] Yet no one science, even theology, can ever achieve an absolute integration of knowledge:

> Concupiscence in the theological sense means that despite an original unity of man there is a pluralism of his faculties and impulses which in practice can never be integrated into an absolute unity surveyable and controllable from a single point. Concupiscence also means that man nevertheless has the task and obligation of working asymptotically toward such a unity, even though it can never be established completely in man's individual and collective history and within the course of that history; it means finally that this pluralism, which can never adequately be integrated, although not really sinful in itself, can always lead to essentially destructive sin and is in any case the reason for the agonistic character of human existence. This nonintegrated pluralism of human existence known as concupiscence, having always a complete integration before it as a task, leading to sin, unavoidably involving conflict, is a peculiarity of man's gnoseological dimension.[58]

Human knowing is marked by an endemic pluralism and competition among the sciences which requires constant dialogue in order to adjudicate between overweening claims to knowledge.

In Rahner's conception of the plurality of the sciences, no one science can claim a privileged position vis-à-vis the others, including metaphysics or theology. Theology deals with the highest and most important reality – the Holy Mystery of God – but its fragmentary and provisional grasp of the incomprehensible mystery of God does not license it to integrate and unify all other knowledge claims: "Theology (together with metaphysics), known as the supreme science, is not a kind of sovereign ruler reducing all other sciences to acting as its instruments and carrying out its plans; it is *one* science among others, with the special task of providing a living example of the fact that the pluralism of the sciences does not permit any dominion that could be exercised by man in a kind of theological totalitarianism."[59] When it comes to the other sciences, the task of theology is to resist and unmask ideological totalizing in the form of materialistic reductionism. Theology should thus be the defender of scientific pluralism, by exposing the

[57] Ibid., 83.

[58] "On the Relationship between Natural Science and Theology," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 19, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 18.

[59] Ibid., 19. This view of theology is at odds with the traditional Thomistic claim that theology is an ultimate form of wisdom encompassing and integrating all other sciences. See the discussion of *sacra doctrina* in Chapter Two, pp. 34–37.

specious claims of one science to encompass all the rest. Rahner insists that theology as a human activity is itself often guilty of gnoseological concupiscence, so it too must listen to the claims of natural science when it oversteps its bounds and purports to pronounce upon a matter that properly belongs in the domain of science. Theology must thus frequently revise its own claims in the light of dialogue with natural science when it realizes that it has illicitly moved from a claim in its proper domain of transcendental experience to the empirical domain of science. Theology must allow itself to be instructed by the sciences on their own terms.

Because of the centrality of theological anthropology in Rahner, the key point of dialogue between religion and science concerns the apparent conflict between evolutionary theory and the revealed doctrine of human beings as created in the image of God as spiritual creatures. This problem had been the subject of heated debate among Roman Catholic theologians during the middle part of the twentieth century, eventually provoking the intervention of the papal magisterium in Pius XII's 1950 encyclical *Humani generis*. At the heart of *Humani generis*'s approach to evolution is the following statement: "Accordingly, the Magisterium of the Church does not forbid that the theory of evolution concerning the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter – for Catholic faith obliges us to hold that the human soul is immediately created by God – be investigated and discussed by experts as far as the present state of human sciences and sacred theology allows."[60] According to this approach, evolution is fully compatible with the Catholic faith so long as it is understood to be a theory about the development only of the human body, not the human person as a soul-body or spirit-matter composite. Regardless of how the scientific account of the evolution of pre-human ancestors goes, it is incapable of determining when the human emerges because that event is a function of the special intervention of God in the history of the cosmos to create and infuse an immortal and spiritual soul into the first human(s). In this way of looking at the problem, the Church's basic teaching about the special divine creation of the human person can be mapped onto any scientific account of evolution so long as that account does not transgress its proper domain so as to amount to a metaphysically reductive or materialistic account. Here we see again that recourse to metaphysics saves the compatibility of science and religion.

The philosophical principle lying behind *Humani generis* is thoroughly Thomistic and finds clear expression in Aquinas's treatment of the origin of the individual soul:

> It must be said that it is impossible that the active power of matter extend its action so as to produce an immaterial effect. For it is manifest that the intellectual principle in man is a principle transcending matter because it has an operation in which the body does not share. And hence it is impossible that the power which is in semen be productive of an intellectual principle. . . . For similarly the intellectual soul, since it has an operation independent of the body,

[60] *The Encyclical "Humani Generis,"* trans. A. C. Cotter, S.J. (Weston, Mass: Weston College Press, 1951), 41.

> subsists (as was proven earlier) and thus it belongs to it to be and to become as such. And since it is an immaterial substance, it cannot be caused by generation but only through creation by God.[61]

Now this account presupposes, of course, that the human soul is immaterial and subsistent.[62] Once this is established, then it can be concluded that it cannot have its origin in any material cause because matter does not have the causal power to produce what is immaterial. In order to explain how a living organism makes the ontological "leap" from matter to spirit, it is necessary to invoke an immaterial causal principle capable of explaining the coming-into-being of the immaterial. The only possible such causal principle is God the creator, because only God can make something begin to be out of no prior potency. Hence God is always required to explain the origin of an immaterial soul, whether it was at the beginning of the human race or at the beginning of any human life. The direct immediate creation of the human soul by God is the only explanation for its existence at any time.[63]

Rahner rejects this traditional Thomistic account of the origin of human soul, however, on the grounds that it compromises both divine transcendence and the genuine causality of created causes. God's fundamental mode of causality is as the creative ongoing source of the very being of all that is; this causality is operative in all things at all times precisely as the condition for any creature's capacities to be and to act in accord with its nature. This causality of being is not a phenomenal item in the universe and does not factor into scientific accounts of nature. For any particular event in the universe, a particular cause is invoked. Metaphysics thus answers the question of the ground of being, while science tells us how beings bring about finite effects through their own causal powers. It is standard Thomistic doctrine that God's generous causality makes it so that created beings act as genuine causes in their own right. It is precisely with this doctrine in mind that Rahner argues that the standard Thomistic-scholastic account of the human soul as the object of a special intervention by God is objectionable because by invoking God to explain the coming-into-being of a human person, God's causality now becomes mundane or predicamental – a cause beside other causes and at their level – and created causality is denigrated by the need to postulate some kind of a metaphysical miracle. As Rahner puts it:

> Does this not postulate an event in which secondary causes within the closed causal series are suddenly replaced by God himself? Does that not make God a demiurge? Does it not turn the secular sobriety of nature and its history into a marvel, in fact a miracle? Is God not in that way suddenly creating in the world instead of creatively and permanently sustaining the world? Are we not suddenly seeing God's creative act, whereas elsewhere we see God's creatures?

[61] ST I, 118, 2.

[62] See the arguments for this view in the chapter on human nature and destiny.

[63] Aquinas's account of the development of the individual soul involves all sorts of complicated questions that are explored in William A. Wallace, "Aquinas's Legacy on Individuation, Cogitation, and Hominization," in *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy*, ed. David Gallagher, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy 28 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 173-193, and Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 373-403.

> Is not precisely the essential difference between natural and secular history on the one hand and the really personal, sacred history of redemption on the other, blurred, if God's action even outside the history of redemption receives a definite predicamental position within space and time, because a definite, precise individual reality in distinction to others and in a different way from others receives a privileged direct relation to God?[64]

According to Rahner, the claim of the special creation of the soul by God sets up an unnecessary tension between religion and science by invoking divine causality to explain a worldly event; science will not accept the usurpation of its prerogatives. Rahner argues that instead of treating the origin of the soul as a special case requiring divine intervention, it should instead be treated the same as every other operation of created causality.

Rahner knows that his position contravenes standard Scholastic metaphysics insofar as it requires acceptance of the idea that a cause (matter) can posit an effect with a greater kind of actuality (spirit) than it possesses. It is standard Aristotelian doctrine that the cause has to have at least as much actuality as what it actualizes; otherwise, where did the actuality of the effect come from? It is at this point that Rahner invokes his own transcendental metaphysics in order to explain how a cause can actively transcend itself in the production of an effect. Since what is at issue here concerns the relationship of matter to spirit, Rahner sets the stage by arguing against the metaphysical heterogeneity of matter and spirit that makes most anthropologies dualistic. Rahner argues instead that there is an original unity and correlativity of matter and spirit disclosed in a transcendental analysis of the human being. Matter and spirit both have their ultimate origin in God, both share in being, both are cognizable by the human subject, both constitute the human person. The human person is inherently a "spirit in the world", meant to achieve transcendence precisely through corporality, materiality, and history: "Spirit must be thought of as seeking and finding itself through the perfection of what is material."[65] Hence matter exists for the sake of spirit, as ordered to spirit as its end; it is inchoate spirit. Rahner describes it as "nothing but a limited and as it were 'solidified' spirit, being, act."[66]

In Rahner's transcendental anthropology, we come to know the meaning of matter precisely insofar as it becomes the body of spirit in the world. Human subjectivity provides the ultimate intelligibility of matter: matter is ordered in all its evolution towards being united to a finite spirit straining beyond and through body to Infinite Spirit. Just as human subjectivity provides the transcendental clue for understanding matter as ordered to spirit, so it also provides the clue for a kind of causality that involves genuine self-transcendence: "What is meant by 'being', 'operation', 'causality', that is to say, all the transcendental properties of being, is ultimately experienced in the knowing subject himself, in his own activity, immanence, self-possession."[67] Human knowing provides the model for a kind of

[64] Karl Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 66. This is Rahner's most extended discussion of the problem.

[65] Ibid., 59.

[66] Ibid., 57.

[67] Ibid., 81.

self-transcending becoming wherein the agent is able to "produce" more than itself in the act of knowing. Insofar as all knowing presupposes the a priori striving of the intellect towards the infinite, knowing is a kind of becoming where the agent stretches beyond itself toward what is greater than it. This primordial experience of finite spirit reaching out to what is more and beyond itself is the paradigm of created causality: "All other efficient causes can only be deficient modes of this causality, if they are really to be ontologically, that is metaphysically, understood."[68]

On the basis of this intentional model of becoming, Rahner educes certain universal metaphysical truths about becoming. First, all becoming is an advance, a going beyond what is originally present: "Becoming involves, rather, that the agent moves beyond and above itself from its own lower plane to a higher, in a self-transcending movement."[69] This is clear in the intentional becoming of knowing, where the act of knowing elevates the knower to a higher level of being. It is vital to this model that the self-transcendence in question be a genuine self-movement and not a being moved. It is the intellect itself, for example, that is the agent of self-transcendence. This active self-transcendence presupposes, of course, the causal undergirding of God, but it is not attributable to God as mover where the creature is only moved. According to this model, and in opposition to traditional Scholastic metaphysics, "a finite being can effect more than it is. . . . Consequently the 'essence' of any being whose self-transcendence is in question does not determine the limits of what can be produced in advance beyond itself."[70] Rahner argues that this assertion does not entail a Humean conclusion that anything can effect anything: "This is especially true in the realm of what is not mind and spirit, for there self-transcendence is always in the proper sense a going beyond an agent's own essence, because absolute Being is not present in the special sense as the ground of spirit and its operation."[71] Rahner thus admits that what is true in the case of spirit-mind is not true in the same sense for matter before it becomes spirit-mind.

This raises the obvious question of just what the account of active self-transcendence in knowing beings establishes about the possibility of active self-transcendence in non-knowing beings. It would appear that matter could not have the active capacity to self-transcend into spirit, since that capacity seems to presuppose spirit. Rahner would have at least two replies to this criticism. The first would be to argue that this kind of an objection presupposes the heterogeneity of spirit and matter that has already been rejected. Instead of seeing pre-spiritual matter as non-spiritual, it is rather the case that it is inchoately spiritual or proto-spiritual, and so capable of some kind of self-transcendence. The second reply would be to argue that the self-transcendence of matter to spirit is effected under the causal agency of God, so it is not simply the result of autonomous matter making the ontological leap into spirit. Rahner here seems to want to have it both ways. He insists that self-transcendence is a genuine intrinsic capacity of a created cause, but then he explains it by an appeal to God's special immanent presence in

[68] Ibid., 87.
[69] Ibid., 88.
[70] Ibid., 89.
[71] Ibid., 90.

spirit as making it possible. In describing the coming into being of a human soul, for example, he says that "the parents are the cause of the entire human being and so also of its soul, because (as we have said on the basis of the particular concept of causation which has been here worked out), that not only does not exclude, but positively includes, the fact that the parents can only be the cause in virtue of the power of God which renders possible their self-transcendence, and which is immanent in their causality without belonging to the constitutive factors of their essence."[72] There is a tension and an ambiguity in Rahner's notion of divine causality because he wants to deny any unique activity of God in the coming-into-being of spirit, but he also implies that there is a special kind of immanence in that process.

With this metaphysical account in mind, Rahner interprets the entire pre-human history of the cosmos as ordered toward the moment when matter achieves reflective and self-transcending awareness of its own orientation toward Absolute Spirit. Man is "the being in whom the basic tendency of matter to find itself in the spirit of self-transcendence arrives at the point where it definitively breaks through."[73] There is a unified history of creation in the development of matter into life and then self-transcending consciousness that moves teleologically towards the latter by active self-transcendence under the causal influence of God: "it is clear that the lower always precedes the actual event of self-transcendence and prepares the way for it by the development of its own reality and order; it is clear that the lower always moves slowly towards the boundary line in its history which it then crosses in its actual self-transcendence."[74] The achievement of self-transcendence in finite spirit, however, is not the ultimate end of the evolutionary process. Rahner's theological anthropology presupposes that finite spirit's capacity for the infinite can only be satisfied in the beatific vision, so the real consummation of the evolution of the cosmos is the self-communication of God to man in the beatific vision:

> We presuppose, therefore, that the goal of the world consists in God's communicating himself to it. We presuppose that the whole dynamism which God has instituted in the very heart of the world's becoming by self-transcendence (and yet not as that which constitutes its nature) is really always meant already as the beginning and first step towards the self-communication and its acceptance by the world.[75]

Rahner goes on to argue that the self-communication by God and its acceptance by man is realized definitively and irrevocably in Christ. The ultimate meaning of the entire evolution of the cosmos is thus found in Christ. The history of matter, its evolution to life and then spirit, finds its true consummation in Christ. Rahner's grand metaphysical evolutionary narrative thus ultimately puts Christ as the goal of all cosmic evolution:

[72] Ibid., 99.

[73] "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 160.

[74] Ibid., 167.

[75] Ibid., 173.

> Jesus is true man; he is truly a part of the earth, truly a moment of the biological evolution of this world, a moment of human natural history, for he is born of woman; he is a man who in his spiritual, human and finite subjectivity is just like us, a receiver of that self-communication of God by grace which we affirm of all men – and hence of the cosmos – as the climax of development in which the world comes absolutely into its own presence and the direct presence of God.[76]

The goal of creation, and hence the entire evolution of the cosmos, is Incarnation.

As these final thoughts reveal, Rahner manages to integrate evolutionary theory into his theological anthropology by mapping on to it his own metaphysics. In this sense Rahner's account is of a piece with the strategy of most contemporary Thomists to reconcile scientific claims and religious claims. Non-transcendental Thomists would certainly dispute Rahner's metaphysical claims, especially his account of self-transcendence, but most would agree with him that the way to reconcile science and religion is by interpreting the latter's claims in such a way as to correlate it with well-established scientific claims. This correlation is achieved mainly by interpreting theological claims in metaphysical terms so as to obviate any conflict with an empirically-based science. Theology must dialogue with science, but the dialogue seems to go mostly one way, with theology listening to science and consequently revising its claims. The traditional goal of integration remains the aim of only a small and dwindling band of Thomists. The rest have accommodated Thomism to science by recourse to the metaphysics of existence. As Rahner's account shows, however, once the line is crossed from integration to dialogue, there is a temptation to move towards independence through the separation of metaphysics and theology from the realm of the empirical. And at that point, as has been noted several times, theology no longer really dialogues with science because it has given up its foothold in the world of nature.

[76] Ibid., 176.

# 5. Evil and Suffering

The specifically *modern* problem of evil was, of course, unknown to Aquinas. This does not mean that evil did not pose an intellectual problem for him, but rather that the nature of the problem was not the need to provide a rational justification for belief in God's goodness in the face of evil through either theodicy or logical defense.[1] Aquinas instead began with a strong doctrine of divine providence and sought to show how that providence encompassed and defeated evil. In reply to the argument that the reality of evil is incompatible with infinite divine goodness, he invokes the fundamental Augustinian axiom that governs his entire treatment: "*God, since he is maximally good, would not have allowed any evil into his work unless he were so omnipotent and good that he could even make good come out of evil.* Hence it pertains to the infinite goodness of God that evil be permitted so that he might bring good out of it."[2] Thus rather than impugning or thwarting the goodness and omnipotence of God, evil instead provides the opportunity for God to display these attributes more clearly by making it the occasion for the introduction of an even a greater good than that which evil originally threatened. The root of this claim is decidedly theological since it presupposes the doctrines of original sin and redemption: in response to the evil introduced into creation by the sinful misuse of freedom, God has sent his Son as Savior so that human beings might reach a state of divinisation higher than that which preceded the Fall.[3]

As this opening outline indicates, it is impossible to give an adequate account of evil from the Thomistic perspective without recourse to specifically theological doctrines. Ultimately, the "answer" to the problem of evil lies in Christ; more specifically, it lies not in doctrines about Christ, but rather in the believer's lived experience of union with Christ in the midst of suffering and evil. Hence any attempt to provide a purely philosophical theodicy is necessarily incomplete and, if the truth be told, unsatisfying. Yet within the framework of a philosophy of religion approach, something akin to a Thomistic philosophical theodicy has been

[1] This point is made by Timothy Jackson at the opening of his "Must Job Live Forever? A Reply to Aquinas on Providence," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 1-3.

[2] ST I, 2, 3 ad 1. The Augustine quotation is from *Enchiridion*, chapter 11.

[3] This is the intuition behind the Easter *Exultet*'s claim: "O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam that won for us so great a redeemer."

extracted and articulated; as will be seen, however, the coherence of such a theodicy ultimately presupposes some theological background assumptions.[4]

The first part of this chapter will outline the classical Thomistic approach to the problem of evil as that was developed mainly by French Thomists. The definitive synthesis of this viewpoint is Charles Journet's *The Meaning of Evil*.[5] This approach is a broadly Augustinian-style theodicy with the main themes being a general account of evil as privation, created free will as the cause of all human misery, the possibility of loving union with God as the greater good justifying the human capacity for evil, and the innocence of God's will from causally originating evil. The second part of the chapter will survey contemporary modifications of the classic doctrine by Thomists, both theologians and philosophers of religion, who either disagree with its approach or desire to engage the contemporary problematic more directly.

## I. THE CLASSICAL APPROACH

### *A. The General Meaning of Evil in the Created Order*

Following St. Augustine, Aquinas denies that evil has any independent metaphysical reality. So even though we cannot help but reify evil in speaking about it, it is not a thing or a substance in its own right. It is rather an absence or lack in a being of some perfection which ought to be there; this is the meaning of evil as privation. A mere absence of a perfection is not an evil, but rather it must be the lack of something that ought to be present in a being precisely because its nature demands it. For example, it is not a privation or evil for a post to be deaf because the capacity to hear is not a constitutive feature of a post. But for a human being to be deaf (as a post) is an evil or privation because it prevents the person from experiencing the full range of sensations that make for optimal human functioning. The judgment that something is afflicted by evil is always indexed against the standard set by the optimally functioning nature of the thing. Evil does not mean the same thing in all its usages; it is not a property having a single or univocal meaning (like blue). Indeed, it is not a property in the normal sense at all, but rather a predicate expressing a judgment that the subject in question is not what it is supposed to be as a flourishing instance of its kind. Evil is thus metaphysically and logically parasitic upon the good: it is a privation in some subject with some goodness insofar as it is, but lacking the full measure of being and goodness that ought to belong to it.

Since evil can only exist in the good and be understood against the intelligibility of the good, it is necessary to understand Aquinas's doctrine of the good in order to understand his doctrine of evil. In Aquinas's metaphysics, anything that exists is *ipso facto* good. Goodness is a transcendental or universal property of being, expressing the relationship that each being has to its own existence precisely as perfective and so desirable.[6] The desirableness ingredient in the notion of good

[4] For an approach that tries to stay philosophical along these lines, see Georges Van Riet, "Le problème du mal dans la philosophie de la religion de saint Thomas," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 71 (1973): 5-45.

[5] Trans. Michael Barry (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1963).

[6] On good as a transcendental property, see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: J. Brill, 1997), 290-334.

involves the correlative notion of appetite. All beings are said to have an appetite or desire for their own perfection in the sense that they have a dynamic tendency toward their own perfection as an end; the "desire" in question here is not conscious and should not be anthropomorphized. To say, as Aquinas does, that all things desire the good does not mean that they all desire the same thing, for every being desires the good appropriate to its nature. Every being has a dynamic tendency to achieve the actuality (ultimately rooted in *esse* or existence) that would complete its nature. Because God is perfect actuality by nature, there is no appetitive striving in God but rather only a resting in or enjoyment of the infinite goodness that belongs to God by nature. For any created being, however, its complete goodness is something that is achieved by action rather than given in its nature; all creatures must progress from being potentially good to actually good. While any created being is good in a qualified sense simply in virtue of enjoying substantial existence, it only becomes fully good through the kinds of actions that achieve the goods constitutive of its natural flourishing.[7] Evil occurs when a being loses or lacks what is necessary for it to be considered a fully functioning instance of its kind or fails to achieve its appropriate end through self-perfective actions. Hence the basic notion of evil is lack of order to a due end (*privatio ordinis ad debitum finem*). Because evil is a privation, it does not have a direct cause; there is no first evil causing all other evil.[8] Only what has some positive reality or goodness can be a direct cause; evil comes about when there is a disordered pursuit of the good by some being. Because no being ever directly acts for the sake of evil, but rather for the sake of some objective that it takes to be good or perfective, evil is only brought about accidentally or indirectly.[9] So evil is also causally parasitic upon good, meaning that it is more powerful where the possibility of goodness is greater.

If we apply this general metaphysical account to the natural order, the first point to be made is that one being's pursuit of its proper good often results in the infliction of evil on another being. When a wolf kills a sheep, the action is evil for the sheep, since it deprives it of being, but it is good for the wolf because it is perfective of its being. Killing a sheep does not make a wolf evil, even though it results in an evil for the sheep. Thus within the context of the order of nature, what can appear to be evil from one perspective (the carnivore's victim) is really not evil when considered from the perspective of the being that is acting so as to become a flourishing instance of its kind. This account presupposes that the order of nature as a whole is a good that justifies the internal losses that it entails; to put the matter another way, it presupposes that a universe with carnivores and parasites is better than one without. In justifying this claim, Aquinas appeals to the Neoplatonic principle of plenitude: God's goodness is more fully manifested in an order of

[7] ST I, 5, 1 ad 1 makes this important distinction between *bonum secundum quid* and *bonum simpliciter*.

[8] ST I, 49, 1. Fallen angels in general and Satan in particular do not function as ultimate causes of evil. The story of their fall and their role in God's providence is not a topic that will be addressed in this chapter.

[9] An interesting discussion of the claim that evil is never directly intended is Carlos Steel, "Does Evil Have a Cause? Augustine's Perplexity and Thomas's Answer," *Review of Metaphysics* 48 (1994): 251-273.

creation that involves variety, multiplicity, and differing degrees of reality than in one containing only one or few beings (presumably the best kind, i.e. angels). Aquinas asserts:

> Since the divine goodness cannot be sufficiently represented through one creature, God produced many and diverse creatures so that what was lacking to one in the representation of divine goodness might be supplemented by another. For while goodness in God is simple and one, goodness in creatures is multiple and divided. Hence the total universe more perfectly represents and participates in God's goodness than any one creature could.[10]

God's goodness therefore requires that there be inequality of form – that there be all different kinds of beings, from angels to amoebas: "The divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction and inequality of things in the universe for the sake of the perfection of the universe; for it would not be a perfect universe if only one grade of goodness were found in things."[11] If there are different kinds of beings, then it is inevitable that their self-perfective activities will sometimes be at cross-purposes, and this is good for the universe insofar as its ultimate purpose is to manifest God's goodness. This also means that since it is good that there be material beings, it does not detract from the goodness of the universe that these are corruptible, perishable, and inherently prone not to achieve their full measure of perfection. In a material created world, beings will inevitably corrupt and become defective in their actions so that many individual beings will not achieve their ends. But these failures in individual parts do not detract from the good of the order of the whole:

> God and nature, indeed any agent, does what is best for the whole, but not what is best for any part except as ordered to the whole (as already noted). This whole which is the universe of creatures is better and more perfect insofar as there are creatures which can sometimes fail to achieve their good with God not interfering. This is both because (as Dionysius teaches in the fourth chapter of *On Divine Names*) divine providence respects nature rather than destroys it, so that when it belongs to the very nature of things that they could possibly fail they sometimes will, and because, as Augustine said in his *Enchiridion*, God is so powerful that he can bring good out of evil. Hence many goods would be lost if God did not permit some evils. For no fire would be kindled if air were not corrupted, nor would the life of the lion be preserved if the ass were not killed, nor would vindicating justice or patient endurance be praised if there were no iniquity.[12]

In these lines are some of the central themes in Thomistic theodicy: a universe of creatures with varying degrees of perfection manifests God's goodness most fittingly; there is an order of such creatures wherein some will fall short of goodness by virtue of their corruptibility, while others will fall short because they

[10] ST I, 47, 1.
[11] ST I, 47, 2.
[12] ST I, 48, 2 ad 1.

are impeded by the natural activities of others; divine providence respects the natural operations of creatures and does not intervene; and God's power is such that he brings forth greater good out of creaturely evils. Yet while this passage implies that natural evil and human evil can be justified in the same way by relating them to the greater good of the whole, it will be noted in the next section that this is not truly the case because human beings cannot be treated as means to an end.

The Thomistic claim that creaturely defectibility is part of the order of a universe that is a manifestation of God's goodness is not tantamount to a Leibnizian claim that evil is justified as a necessary feature of the best of all possible worlds. Aquinas explicitly rejects the idea that there could be a best of all possible worlds. He thinks that God is sovereignly free either to create or not to create; God's goodness does not constrain him to create since it is internally perfect in the very life of the Trinity.[13] Once God does freely decide to create, his wisdom and goodness do not necessitate the choice of one particular order of beings rather than another, because every order is inadequate as a manifestation of divine goodness. No created order exists which could not be improved upon since none is commensurate with the infinity of the divine goodness.

> It is clear that the entire reason for an order imposed by a wise craftsman on the things he makes is adapted to the end. Whenever the end is proportionate to the things made for the sake of the end, then the wisdom of the maker is limited to a determinate order. But the divine goodness is an end immeasurably surpassing all created things. Divine wisdom is thus not determined to a certain order of things such that no other order could flow from it. Hence it must be said that God could make other things than he has made.[14]

Whatever world God decides to create, there will always be a gap between it and the divine goodness such that there could be fuller manifestation. Consequently, there is no best possible finite world when the criteria for "best" is "adequate manifestation of the infinite divine goodness." As John Hick has noted, this means that there is a basic difference between a Thomistic and Leibnizian sense of a best possible world.[15] The Thomist supposes that because of the infinite transcendence of God, there is always a possible universe that is superior to the given universe but less than God. The scale of universes approaches asymptotically to God's goodness without ever reaching it, always leaving room for a better. Leibniz, however, envisions a possible world which contains the most reality without reference to whether or not it is close to divine goodness (which is impossible). The infinite mind of God has surveyed all the possibilities and simply chosen the best

[13] See Gregory Reichberg, "The Communication of the Divine Nature: Thomas's Response to Neoplatonism," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 66 (1992): 215-228. For an alternative view, arguing that God's goodness necessitates diffusion *ad extra* in creation, see Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 220-225.

[14] ST I, 25, 5.

[15] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, Revised Edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 160-166.

according to another set of criteria. Neither view determines world values by what is best for humans, but rather by what best expresses the creative goodness of God.

It has often been argued that even if God could not make the best of all possible worlds, he could have made a better world than he did. Based on what we have just seen, a Thomist could reply that since that complaint would apply to every world, it is idle; things will always be less good than they could be. Yet this kind of reply is unsatisfying, for it seems obvious that this world could be improved in countless ways by an omnipotent and good God. Aquinas himself argues that in one sense God could not make a better world, while in another sense he could (and did!). The sense in which God could not make a better world is in terms of its internal ordering of essences to each other and toward the maximal manifestation of divine goodness possible for this order of essences.[16] Given the choice to create this set of natures as a manifestation of divine goodness, God could not improve on either the essences or their interrelationship. God could make better kinds of beings and put them together in a different order, but that would be to create a different universe. Any universe that God creates will involve a maximal ordering of its constituent parts as a manifestation of divine goodness. So God could make a better universe, but he could not make a better version of this universe or improve upon his making; it is not possible to use "better" adverbially to imply that God could have used more goodness or wisdom in fashioning the universe.

There is a sense, however, in which God could make a better universe by improving the perfective attributes of the beings he has created and ordered. So the legitimate question for God's justice that emerges from this account is not "why did God not make better kinds of beings?", but rather "Why did God not make the kinds he did with better attributes allowing them to attain flourishing in a more ready fashion?" Specifically, the problem of evil arises from the obvious realization that human beings are subjected to many infirmities inimical to their flourishing. Why did not God make it easier for human beings to achieve their end by eliminating the many pernicious features of our world? The short answer is that God did, only human beings forfeited the blessings of that original condition and now exist in a punitive condition from which God is bringing an even greater good than originally bestowed through Christ. It is to this problem of evil, the evil introduced by human sin, that we must now turn.

*B. Human Evil*

Aquinas asserts that human evil divides exhaustively into evil of fault (*malum culpae*), the evil we originate by our wills in sinful action, and evil of punishment (*malum poenae*), the privations that we suffer against our wills as just punishment by God for our sins.[17] Since the latter is a response to the former, ultimately all human evil is a result of sin and the evil of fault is the primary sense of evil.[18] Aquinas's account of evil is thus explicitly theological, since it attributes all the evils of human life to sin and its punitive consequences: "It belongs to the tradition of the faith that the rational creature could incur no harm of any kind – whether of

[16] ST I, 25, 6. For a comprehensive discussion of this question, see Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 216-227.

[17] ST I, 48, 5 and DM 1, 4.

[18] ST I, 48, 6.

soul, body, or anything else – except as a consequence of some prior sin, either personal or in the nature; whence it follows that every privation of any good that would make it possible to function well as a human being is a punishment."[19] In order to make sense of Aquinas's account of sin, the root of all evil, it is necessary to begin with his philosophical account of the possibility of sin as a necessary concomitant to created freedom. The second part of the story, however, involves a theological account of the history of sin and its punishment.

Like all evil, sin is a privation; specifically, it is the privation in a human action of the due order to the human good – God.[20] Human action, like all created action, is the means whereby the being achieves its end or *telos*. All created beings strive to become fully actualized instances of their kind. What distinguishes rational creatures from non-rational creatures is that they pursue their end intelligently and freely; they are self-determining not in the sense of being able to determine their own ends, since all ends are set by the nature, but rather in being able to choose whether or not to make that end the intentional goal or purpose of their actions. While all created beings are contingently related to their good, the ground of the possibility of defection is radically different in rational and non-rational creatures.[21] Non-rational creatures can fail to achieve their appropriate ends because of their inherently corruptible natures as material or because they are impeded by another's pursuit of its own good. With rational creatures, however, they are contingently related to their own good in a different way through the presence of will. Through intelligent free choice, they can move themselves towards what is not genuinely good and so fail to achieve their end.

Aquinas argues that it is of the very nature of a created will that it be defectible. In discussing the possibility of sin in the angels, Aquinas says:

> It must be said that both angels and indeed all rational creatures can sin when they are considered solely according to their natural status; if any creature were impeccable, this would be a gift of supernatural grace rather than a natural condition. The reason is that to sin is to deviate from the rectitude that an action ought to have, whether in natural, artistic, or moral matters. Only the action of a being whose rule of action is identical with its own power of action is incapable of deviation. For if the hand of the engraver were itself to constitute the rule for engraving, then he could only engrave rightly, but if the rectitude of his work were to be measured by another rule, then it could be done rightly or wrongly. Only the will of God, however, is identical with its own rule because God is not ordered to some end other than himself. But every created will has rectitude in action only insofar as it conforms to the rule of God's will as its ultimate end, just as the will of any subject ought to be conformed to the will of his superior, as a soldier's to his commander's. Thus only in the divine will is there no possibility of sin, while there can be sin in every created will considered in its natural condition.[22]

[19] DM 1, 4.
[20] ST I-II, 71.
[21] See Claude Geffré, "La possibilité du peché," *Revue Thomiste* 57 (1957): 213-245.
[22] ST I, 63, 1.

The metaphysical key to the possibility of sin in rational creatures is that they are not constituted in their ends by their natures. Because rational creatures must act freely so as to move from potentially being good to actually being good in a way that accords with the imperatives inscribed in their natures by the will of God, they have the inherent possibility of failure with respect to their own good. The notion of a rule implied here is not a voluntaristic or divine command rule, but rather refers to what the rational creature can recognize as the moral requirements for the fulfillment of its nature; these imperatives are formally intelligible as natural law precepts which are ultimately grounded in the divine will as expressions of the eternal law of God.[23] Because rational creatures can formally recognize the demands of their natures, those demands become a moral law and set up a due order of goods.

Jacques Maritain offered the most influential Thomistic analyses of the metaphysical roots of moral evil in the twentieth century. The best English presentation of his views can be found in the 1942 Aquinas Lecture: *Saint Thomas and the Problem of Evil*.[24] Maritain emphasizes that moral evil originates in the will's failure to adhere to the due rule of action prior to its actual choice of a disordered good. He points out the key text of Aquinas in the *Disputed Question on Evil* (*De malo*):

> In all instances where one thing is meant to be the rule and measure of another, the good of what is ruled and measured consists in its being ruled and conformed to the rule and measure; its evil comes from not being so ruled. For example, if an artisan is supposed to cut a line according to a certain rule or plan and he does not do so properly, which is to cut badly, the evil in the line is caused by the artist's defective failure to follow the rule or measure. Similarly, all human desires and actions ought to be measured by the rule of reason and the divine law; hence the non-use of the rule of reason or the divine law must be presupposed in the will prior to any disordered choice. And for this sort of non-use of the rule there is no need to seek any other cause than the freedom of the will, through which it can act or not act. When this actual failure to attend to the proper rule is considered by itself, it is neither evil of fault nor penalty; for the soul cannot always be actually attending to the rule; it is rather that the origin of fault lies in the will proceeding to the act of choice without considering the proper rule. For example, the craftsman does not sin because he does not always consider the rule, but rather because he proceeds actually to cut without considering the rule; similarly, the fault in the will lies not in a mere non-consideration of the rule of reason or the divine law, but rather in proceeding to choice without the rule. This is why Augustine says in the twelfth book of the *City of God* that the will is the cause of sin insofar as it is a deficient cause and he compares this defect to silence or shadows because it is a pure negation.[25]

[23] See the discussion of natural law on pp. 140–150.
[24] (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942).
[25] DM 1, 3.

The non-consideration of the rule is only a negation and not a moral flaw until it becomes a privation in the choice.[26] For someone not to attend to the prohibition against stealing, for example, is not necessarily a sin. It only becomes a privation or sin when the agent chooses to take what does not belong to him and leaves out of consideration the rule to respect what belongs to others. Maritain describes this deficient causation of the will as "nihilation": by the failure to attend to the rule, the free creature introduces nothingness, privation, and evil into the action.

Another way to illustrate the privation involved in sin is to consider it as involving both an aversion from the divine rule and a conversion towards a disordered good. In Aquinas's psychology of sin, the choice is motivated by the sinner's voluntary desire to pursue what he or she takes to be good or perfective. But in turning toward a good that is not genuinely ordered to the sinner's flourishing, the sinner is implicitly turning away from the rule of God. The aversion from God logically precedes the positive choice to pursue the disordered good, but is not directly intended by the sinner; what the sinner directly intends is the created good. The sinner freely chooses some good that lacks the due order to God that it ought to have. The privation is this lack of due ordering of all goods to God. The formal element of sin lies in the privative, disordered, and defective disregard for the divine will in the act of choice. As will be highlighted in the next section, this distinction between aversion and conversion is important because it is part of the Thomistic picture to describe God as causally underwriting the free creature's movement towards any good, but to deny that God causes the aversion or privation that is its pre-condition in sin. The ultimate cause of the privation involved in sin is created freedom and created freedom alone. Because the only object that could inevitably necessitate the will is the beatific vision of God, which is not a possible choice this side of heaven, the human will is free to choose any finite good with or without its due ordering to God.[27]

This metaphysical account of the possibility of moral evil is incomplete, however, because it fails to consider the actual history of sin and its effects on human choice. It is at this point that the theological doctrine of original sin comes into play.[28] Aquinas believes that the first human beings, which for him meant the biblical Adam and Eve as historical figures, were created by God in a privileged condition of grace traditionally called original justice. The justice or rectitude of that state involved "reason being submissive to God, the lower powers to reason, and the body to the soul."[29] By reason here is meant both the intellect and the will, while the lower powers in question are the sensible appetites or emotions. The original condition of man thus included a proper order and perfect harmony of all

[26] Maritain argues that the non-consideration of the will prior to the act of choice is somehow a defective initiative of the will that is ultimately responsible for evil without being a privation. Other Thomists, myself included, think that the non-consideration of the rule is only evil insofar as it logically precedes and governs the sinful choice as a privation. For contemporary defenses of Maritain, see *Jacques Maritain: The Man and his Metaphysics*, ed. John F.X. Knasas (American Maritain Association, 1988), 191-253.

[27] ST I-II, 10, 2.

[28] The best overview in English can be found in the Appendices and commentary by T. C. O'Brien in his translation of the relevant questions (I-II, 81-86) in Volume 26 of the Blackfriars *Summa theologiae: Original Sin* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1965).

[29] ST I, 95, 1.

his moral powers with respect to God as his final end; this ordering of parts was the very disposition or habitual state of Adam and Eve. In addition to moral rectitude, God also gave the gift of immortality by preserving the first human beings from the corruption that is natural to embodied beings; there was no bodily suffering or death. This original condition of moral rectitude and immortality was a gift or grace freely bestowed by God to enable human beings to achieve their natural end with ease, and God's intention was that all subsequent human beings would enjoy precisely the same status and so readily achieve natural flourishing both moral and physical.[30]

The blessings bestowed by God in original justice did not compromise human freedom. Adam and Eve remained free to accept or reject the life of grace bestowed by God. Following the Augustinian tradition, Aquinas interprets their original rejection of the gifts bestowed by God as rooted in the sin of pride.[31] In general, the sin of pride involves willing some excellence or good that is not due because it is not proportionate to the one willing. In the case of Adam and Eve, they willed a spiritual good that was beyond their due: to be like God both in determining good and evil and in acting on that knowledge so as to achieve beatitude. This original sin is caused by the free movement of the will alone, since the gifts of original justice rule out an explanation by ignorance or disordered passion (as in subsequent human beings).[32]

In response to the sin of Adam and Eve, God revoked the gifts of grace that he had intended to be the normal habitual condition of human beings. All subsequent human beings are thus born into a condition that lacks the order of original justice; this is called the state of original sin. Thomists consider the state of original sin to be the privation of the gifts of original justice. This means that rather than seeing human beings as corrupted by the Fall, as in the Reformed tradition, Thomists see the Fall as leaving human beings bereft of the help that they need to order their lives to God as end. Fallen humanity lacks the order of the mind and will to God, the order of the passions to reason, and the order of the body to an incorruptible soul. We are thus born into a state of alienation from God, marked by ignorance, an ongoing struggle to harmonize our emotions with our reason (concupiscence), and a susceptibility to bodily suffering and death.[33] Aquinas argues that the intellectual, moral, and bodily frailties that mark the human condition provide grounds for a probable argument that our present condition is punitive or penal. Aquinas acknowledges that one might argue that the infirmities of the human condition are simply the result of being embodied rational creatures, but he thinks that it is incompatible with divine providence for God to have originally intended us to be subject to systematic infirmity.[34] Thus while original sin remains formally a revealed teaching, Thomas nonetheless thinks that it is also a reasonable inference

[30] The original human beings also enjoyed a supernatural personal relationship with God in grace, but I am not going to elaborate that relationship here because the focus is on what was lost to the nature as a result of the Fall.

[31] ST II-II, 162, 3.

[32] John Bowlen has argued that Aquinas is uncharacteristically voluntaristic in accounting for sin in Adam and Eve. See "Psychology and Theodicy in Aquinas," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 7 (1998): 129-156.

[33] On the moral capacities of fallen human beings, see ST I-II, 109.

[34] SCG IV, 52.

from the *prima facie* incompatibility between our many infirmities and God's goodness to the conclusion that our present condition is penal.

Yet it does seem unfair that all human beings after Adam and Eve should inherit a debilitated condition that can somehow be described as sin when they have personally done nothing to deserve the punishment. In response to this claim against God's justice three things must be said. First, original sin is only sin in a special or qualified sense in Adam and Eve's progeny. In Adam and Eve, original sin is sin in the full sense of a personal, voluntary act. In every human after them, the privative and penal condition of the nature is not a result of personal sin, but rather a result of sharing in human nature as inherited from the first human beings. Our privative condition is only "sin" insofar as we are united somehow by way of common human nature to the voluntary sin of Adam and Eve. The second point is that because original justice was a gift of God surpassing human nature, it is in no way owed to us in strict justice by God. The punitive withdrawal of a gift because of an original failure to use it properly is not grounds to reproach God's justice. Finally, and most importantly, it must be remembered that God's ultimate response to the initiative of sin introduced in human history by the Fall was not punitive, but rather to bring even a greater good to the human condition by restoring all things in Christ.

*C. God's Will and Evil*

It is a fundamental axiom of Augustinian-Thomistic theodicy that God the Creator causes through his intellect and will everything that is, and that everything that is, insofar as it is, is good. How then can evil enter into the world created by God? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to distinguish between the different senses of evil that we have already noted. There is, first of all, the evil that afflicts material creatures (natural evils). Second, there is the evil of punishment or penalty that afflicts human beings. Third, there is the evil of fault or sin. The first can be reconciled rather straightforwardly with God's will, the second with some more difficulty, while the third poses more complicated problems. Let us take each in turn.

When it comes to so-called natural evils, these are not truly evil when seen in the context of the good of the universe as a whole. As noted earlier, a universe in which God's goodness is displayed in a wide profusion of beings is better than one in which fewer creatures exist. So in willing the good of the universe as a whole, where the good is measured in terms of maximal manifestation of divine goodness both intensively and extensively, God directly wills that there exist kinds that will oppose other kinds and material beings that will eventually corrupt. Evils or losses at the level of individuals are accepted as a necessary concomitant of such a universe and so are willed indirectly (*per accidens*) by God.[35] This kind of reasoning cannot apply to human beings as individual members of the species, however, since they are not parts ordered to a greater whole, but rather spiritual persons ordered directly to God and so "wholes" in themselves.

When it comes to evil of punishment, the evil that afflicts human beings against their will through some privation in form or in the power to act, it is caused by

[35] ST I, 49, 2.

God's will for the sake of the good of God's justice. God's justice is a part of the good order of the universe and requires that the disorder and guilt of sin be set right by some punishment of the sinner. What God wills directly is the good of justice; the resulting privation in the sinner is only indirectly willed by God. Under the evils of fault are included the privations caused by original sin: the inability to will God as the ultimate end, the tension between reason and passion, ignorance, and bodily suffering and death. All these ills are ultimately punishment in justice for the sin of Adam. As noted in the previous section, since these privations were originally remedied through a gratuitous gift, God's justice is not really impugned when the conditions of his generosity are violated through pride.

When it comes to the penalties inflicted for personal sin, however, the case becomes more complex. As will be noted later in the discussion of Aquinas's *Commentary on Job*, there is no necessary temporal punishment for personal sin. God's providence does not always correlate personal sin with temporal punishments and sufferings, although sometimes it may for the good of the sinner. Leaving this issue aside for the moment, the more difficult problem is posed by eternal punishment for personal sin in hell. In order to understand hell, it is necessary to understand what Thomists mean by *mortal* sin. What makes a sin mortal is that it kills or destroys the sinner's life with God.[36] It is the choice of some moral objective as good that is radically incompatible with a loving relationship with God. While all sin involves a turning away or *aversio* from God, mortal sin is a definitive refusal to live in a loving, personal relationship with God. Mortal sins are irreparable by the sinner; that is, once the sinner turns away from God, it is not within the sinner's power to re-establish the relationship. If a person were to die in this state, then the penal consequences would be eternal separation from God.[37] God does not punish the damned by inflicting some new evil upon them, but rather by allowing them to live with the consequences of their own freely-willed condition of self-alienation from God: "the souls of evildoers will adhere unchangeably to the good which they themselves have chosen."[38] The fundamental "pain" of hell is not physical torment, but rather the loss of the infinite good of God.[39] In addition to the loss of God, the damned also experience a "pain of sense" whereby they experience a kind of bondage to their bodies as a result of their having desired bodily goods instead of spiritual goods.[40] Aquinas acknowledges that one of the purposes of punishment is to convert the sinner, but he says that this is not possible for the damned because the human will's fundamental orientation is eternally fixed at death. Yet this does not mean there is no remedial purpose for eternal punishment, since it may deter other sinners by producing a fear of such punishment in them.[41] The meaning of hell cannot ultimately be understood apart from the truth that the purpose of God's creation of human beings was so that they could enter into the very loving friendship that is the life of the Trinity. In order to be capable of friendship with God, human beings

[36] ST I-II, 88, 1.
[37] ST I-II, 87, 3.
[38] SCG IV, 93.
[39] ST I-II, 87, 4.
[40] SCG IV, 90.
[41] SCG III, 144.

had to be intellectual, volitional, and free. Coerced friendship is a contradiction in terms; friendship requires mutual choice. For the choice to be genuine, it must be possible for some to refuse the offer of friendship with God. Since the choices made by human beings in this life are determinative of their eternal fates, it is possible that some people have maintained a life-long refusal to enter into relationship with God. What they receive in eternity is what they have chosen in life.[42]

While natural evils and punishment are indirectly willed by God as concomitants to the good of the order of the universe, the evil of fault bears a different relationship to the divine will. As a violation of the divine order or good, sin cannot even be indirectly willed or caused by God.[43] Aquinas insists that the ultimate cause of moral evil, as a privation of the due order that a human act ought to have, is the will of the sinner. As noted in the previous section, the first cause of the failure to consider the rule of action is the freedom of the will itself. Precisely because sin is a privation or non-being, it escapes God's causality because God's causality extends to what is of being and goodness.

Yet while the basic Thomistic strategy is to say that sin as privation is caused by the will of the sinner, thereby absolving God's will from responsibility, vexing problems remain because of the strong doctrine of providence. Even though God is not the direct cause of evil, nonetheless it is due to God's will that there is a world where free creatures are able to sin and, as we have seen especially in the century just past, in monstrous ways. So even though God is not directly responsible for any individual act of sin, he is responsible for the general condition. As noted earlier, God could have not created at all or created an order in which there was no sin. Instead, God choose an order wherein there is sin. Why? And not only did God set the initial conditions of a world in which there is sin, but God continues to underwrite it by conserving all beings in existence. The Thomist God is not some Deist watchmaker who sets the initial conditions and then causally leaves the scene, but rather a God who causes every being and every action at every moment.[44] As the sinner sins, that sinner is being held in being by God's power. According to the strong view of divine providence, nothing happens outside that providence, including sin. What then is the relationship of God's will to particular sins in the concrete? Finally, there is also the question of why God does not intervene to restrain evil and convert sinners. Is not God guilty of evil by neglect? These thorny questions are traditionally resolved by recourse to God's "permission" of evil. So rather than saying that sin is directly opposed to God's will, in which case it would not be a live option, Thomists say that it is "permitted" by God's will. Just what this means, however, has traditionally been the object of dispute among Thomists and of criticism by others.

At the first level, God is said to allow moral evil into the created order not for the sake of free will, but rather for the sake of love. The purpose of creating a universe of free and fallible creatures is not to fill out the ranks of being in accord with the principle of plenitude for the sake of the greater good of the universe, but

[42] This account presupposes that every person is given an offer to enter into loving relationship with God during this life. On the problem of universal salvation and other religions, see Chapter Nine.

[43] ST I-II, 79.

[44] ST I, 104-105. See the discussion on creation and conservation in Chapter Eight, pp. 185–187.

rather so that there might be creatures whom God could invite to share in the inner life of the Trinity. Human beings are not like members of other species whose individual flourishing is not essential to the good of the whole, but rather spiritual beings or persons individually created to achieve consummation in God. The ultimate purpose of creation is to invite human beings into a loving friendship with God wherein the creatures will share in God's own life of love. In order for that relationship to be genuine love, the creature must enter it in genuine freedom. Thus two-way freedom, for good and for bad, is a necessary condition for God's work of love. So God allows the possibility of sin as the price paid for the possibility of love. Jacques Maritain sums up the logic of the position thus:

> The creature's liability to sin is thus the price paid for the outpouring of creative Goodness, which in order to *give itself personally* to the extent that it transforms into itself something other than itself, must be *freely loved with friendship's love and communion*, and which to be freely loved with friendship's love and communion must create *free* creatures, and which in order to create them free must create them *fallibly* free. Without fallible freedom there can be no created freedom; without created freedom there can be no love in mutual friendship between God and creature; without love in mutual friendship between God and creature, there can be no supernatural transformation of the creature into God, no entering of the creature into the joy of his Lord. Sin, evil, is the price of glory.[45]

So at one level there is a kind of general permission of sin by God as the necessary condition for freedom as the necessary condition for love. This is the greater good that motivates and precedes any act of sin; as will be shown later, there are also goods – indeed greater goods – that God wills to draw out of evil, but these cannot be said to provide the original motivation for the permission of evil.

The strong doctrine of providence means that Thomists are also required to explain how God's knowledge and will are causally involved with moral evil in the singular and concrete as well as in general. How do individual acts of evil fit into the order of the universe known and willed efficaciously by God and ordered to God's goodness? As noted earlier, it is a feature of God's providence to respect the causal modality of creatures.[46] So having created free creatures, God respects their freedom by not causally overriding their choices. It is in this sense that God "permits" individual acts of evil: he does not decide to impede them. God's will does not give permission for evil in the normal sense of authorizing or endorsing it, but rather in the metaphorical sense of permission as a decision not to prevent creatures from originating evil.[47] Evil is against God's will, but God allows human beings to initiate it for the sake of freedom and love, and because God's power is such that God can bring greater good out of evil. So while in a general sense (traditionally known as God's *antecedent* will) God wills that all spiritual creatures attain their ultimate end in him, in the concrete (traditionally known as God's

[45] *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, 19. The emphasis is in the original.
[46] ST I, 19, 8.
[47] ST I, 19, 12.

*consequent* will) God wills to allow some creatures to fail to achieve their ends as a consequence of their free choice of evil. God's will is ultimately fulfilled both in those who attain their end and in those that do not.

The most contentious issue among classical Thomists is the metaphysical explanation of God's causal involvement with morally evil acts. Classical Thomists argue that God's causality is the ultimate explanation for every being and every action at every moment. This means that God's governance of creatures extends not only to causing their conservation in being,[48] but also to causing their every action by "moving" them to act.[49] As applied to human beings, this means that God is causally involved in every act of intellect and will in human beings. Aquinas did not think that that causal activity compromised genuine two-way human freedom. Just exactly how that causal activity is compatible with genuine freedom has been the object of much dispute among Thomists, and of criticism by non-Thomists as divine determinism at worst and compatibilism at best.[50] While the larger problem cannot be treated here, nonetheless it is necessary to ask the question of how God's all-encompassing causality can be reconciled with human beings in their choosing and doing of evil.[51] Aquinas's texts on this topic are under-developed, so Thomists have tried to fill in the gap in order to reconcile God's innocence of sin with God's comprehensive providence through intellect and will. At least four major different Thomistic approaches to this problem can be identified.

At one end of the Thomist spectrum are those who would read Aquinas to say that there is no causal action of God in creatures other than the act of creation-conservation; there is no distinct divine causal action for every determinate action of the creature. God creatively upholds free creatures precisely as self-determining beings. God's causality extends to the free being of the creature, but not to the free actions of the creature. This view has the attraction of both saving human freedom from divine determinism and absolving God from causal responsibility for evil. The weakness of this solution, in the eyes of classical Thomists, is that it unacceptably restricts God's causality and God's knowledge. Aquinas clearly asserts that God's knowledge of creation is causal-practical.[52] As pure act and first cause, God's knowledge of creation cannot be as a result of being acted upon by creatures. Hence it would seem that the only way for God's omniscience to be secured is by holding for a determinate causal involvement in every human action as the ground of knowledge. A second alternative, identified with the Jesuit Luis de Molina and thus called Molinism, argues that God's motion of creatures to the good is indeterminate and gets specified by the creaturely will in the act of choice.[53] This highly sophisticated view accounts for God's knowledge of evil by

[48] ST I, 104.

[49] ST I, 105.

[50] I discuss the larger issue in my "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 99-102 and in the discussion of divine providence in Chapter Eight.

[51] The best overview of the classical debate on this topic is J. H. Nicolas, O.P., "La permission du péché," *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 5-37, 186-206, 509-546. My typology here is based on Nicolas.

[52] ST I, 14, 8.

[53] See *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the* Concordia*)*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Freddoso's introduction is a masterful overview of Molinism. For a

the doctrine of what is called God's middle knowledge. Middle knowledge is between God's natural knowledge of pure possibles and his willed knowledge of the actual created order. The objects of middle knowledge are conditional future events; that is, it is knowledge of all possible contingent outcomes in all possible contingent circumstances. This knowledge is of what free creatures would do in any conceivable set of circumstances; it is pre-volitional because it does not depend on what God wills to be actual, but rather on what the creatures themselves would do if they were placed in the circumstances envisioned. This view has the advantage over the previous account of providing a comprehensive explanation of divine omniscience and of absolving God from causal responsibility for evil. God's will determines which possible world is the actual world, but what free creatures do in that world is decided by them. Classical Thomists once again lodge the fundamental protest that this view compromises divine transcendence by making God's knowledge and causality dependent upon creaturely self-determination; they also criticize the coherence of middle knowledge and many other features of Molinism.[54] The debate still rages.

A third influential position on the relationship between God's knowing will and human evil belongs to Jacques Maritain. It is perhaps little known that among the wide range of topics treated by Maritain, it was his work on the problem God's permission of evil that he considered to be his most significant philosophical contribution "to the progress of thought."[55] In response to what he calls Neo-Banezian[56] criticism (the next view to be considered) of his earlier treatment of the topic in *Existence and the Existent,* Maritain returned to the question in the last years of his life in *God and the Permission of Evil.* Maritain's central claim is that there is a fundamental and irreducible dissymmetry between the causal explanation of good and evil: in the line of good, God's will is the first cause; while in the line of evil, it is the creature's will that is the first cause. His complaint against the Neo-Banezians is that they want to trace both good and evil back to God's will as ultimate cause by attributing an antecedent permissive decree to God's will for every evil act; according to them, God's will, whether directly causative or indirectly permissive, is the metaphysically antecedent ultimate cause of everything. Yet by attributing an antecedent permissive will to God, they ultimately make God responsible for evil because a decision of God's will explains why the creature sins. Hence Maritain argues that the ultimate cause of sin is the free creature's capacity to disregard the rule of action and so introduce privation or non-being into the action. In so doing, the creature is capable of frustrating or shattering God's offer of grace to do what is good; Maritain describes this

contemporary defense of Molinism, see Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[54] The classic critique is R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., trans. Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B., *Predestination* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1944), 126-152.

[55] This is the assessment he offers in *God and the Permission of Evil,* trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966), viii.

[56] Dominic Banez (1528-1604) was the primary Dominican critic of Molina in the great debate about grace and free will commonly called the *De auxilliis* controversy (from the Latin word for grace). Banez's views were pretty much party line among Dominicans right through the middle of this century (e.g. Garrigou-LaGrange). Now many, myself included, think that Banez comes too close to making Aquinas into a divine determinist.

creaturely resistance to God's help to choose the good as a "nihilation." Maritain's account presupposes that God always tries to move or activate the creature to do the good, but that that offer is not necessarily causally efficacious because it can be shattered by the human will as the ultimate origin of moral evil.

Maritain's views were subjected to searching criticism by his erstwhile ally Jean-Hervé Nicolas in the series of articles on the permission of sin previously noted. Against Maritain, Nicolas articulates the fundamental classical Thomist concern that any denial that God's will universally stands at the ultimate causal head of the line compromises divine transcendence and omniscience. In the case of Maritain, however, the complaint comes only with respect to moral evil. By attributing the origin of moral evil to the created will, Maritain saves God from moral responsibility for evil but undermines divine providence by removing moral evil from its purview. According to Nicolas, God's will must be the ultimate cause of everything and the ultimate explanation for how God knows all contingent events. Nicolas also criticizes Maritain's notion of a shatterable divine motion as a phantom: how could a divine motion that never moves be real? He also argues that if we attribute to the free creature the capacity of nihilation, then we ultimately make it responsible for both good and evil because the former can only come about through non-nihilation. Nicolas argues that the only way God's providence can be truly comprehensive is if God's will determines everything antecedent to its eventuation. In order to make sense of how this works in the case of moral evil, it is necessary to distinguish between three components: the free subject, the subject's choice of some (disordered) created good, and the aversion or privation of the will from the divine rule. The first two elements are known directly by God as caused by him. The privation is known indirectly by God, as a result of his knowledge of the good that he did not will to produce; this is the antecedent permissive decree. The obvious disadvantage of this viewpoint, noted by Maritain, is that it seems to make God responsible for moral evil by not willing that the appropriate good be realized and by not causing the movement toward the disordered good. In reply to this complaint, Nicolas would argue that God's gracious help turning the will of a human being toward the good is not in any way owed to the creature, so that its omission is not culpable on God's part.

At the end of the day, the philosophical problem of God's permission of evil comes up against the theological mystery of predestination: Why are some people chosen by God for salvation, while others are not? Why is it that the offer of grace efficaciously achieves the salvation of some but not all? Could not an all-powerful and all-good God have devised some plan whereby everyone would freely convert by being offered grace in such a way as to make it irresistible? The ways of God are, of course, inscrutable; it is a mystery to us why God's plan works the way it does. Yet even with that mystery in mind, the Thomist, like the contemporary Free Will Defender, ultimately wants to say that if humans are genuinely free, there is no way of God guaranteeing the choice of himself as ultimate good in every instance.[57] God could only guarantee that outcome by either causally over-riding

[57] For a contrast between the way that Thomists appeal to free will with the Free Will Defense position of Alvin Plantinga, see Theodore J. Kondolean, "The Free Will Defense: New and Old," *The Thomist* 47 (1983): 1-42. I will discuss the prospect of a Thomist appeal to the contemporary kind of free will defense in the second part of the chapter.

the will, in which case freedom is forfeited, or by creating creatures already in the beatific vision, in which case freedom of choice is an inoperative concept because the will is naturally necessitated to chose the infinite good. So if God wants freedom for the sake of love, then God cannot guarantee that human beings will choose to love him. God must therefore allow evil, for the sake of the good of love. Yet there is also a still greater good to be considered.

*D. Christ and the Problem of Evil*

One of the main reasons detractors have criticized the classical Thomist concern with God's "permission" of evil is that it seems to render God passive or even indifferent to evil. As we have seen, the main sense of permission is negative: God does not impede the introduction of evil by sin. Yet it would be a grave misunderstanding of the classical Thomist position to see God's attitude toward evil as essentially passive. It is not the case that God has stood by as an eternal and immutable spectator indifferently watching the march of evil in human history. It is rather the case that God has actively entered into human history to overcome the evil that is against his will and, according to the central article of Christian faith, defeated it definitively in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus God's will with respect to evil can only be adequately understood through what is revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is at this point that we enter into what Thomists would consider to be specifically theological or revelation-based discourse, requiring the acceptance of claims through faith without rational evidence. For this reason, many Thomistic philosophical treatments of evil do not make much reference to Christ. Yet to extract a purely philosophical theodicy out of Aquinas as if it could stand on its own is a distortion of Aquinas's views, and not much consolation to boot.

As noted at the outset of this treatment, the central Augustinian axiom guiding Aquinas's thought on evil is that God would never have permitted any evil if he were not capable of bringing forth from that evil an even greater good. The ground for this claim is Christological; it is the belief that in remedying the sin of Adam in Christ, God has given to humanity an even greater blessing than what was originally given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. By becoming incarnate in Christ and conquering death by resurrection, God has made it possible for those who are baptized into Christ to enjoy a real participation through the grace of Christ in the very Trinitarian life of God. This is not to say that God could not have bestowed this blessing on humankind except as a result of the Fall, but rather to say that it has come to us after the Fall and we must therefore interpret it as a response to the Fall based on what is said in Scripture.[58] Nor is it to say that God permitted the Fall for the sake of the Incarnation either, as if the former were the means to the latter; the Fall was against God's will as a rebellion, and the Incarnation-Redemption is a gracious response beyond all proportion to human sin. In the sending of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth and in his loving acceptance of the consequences of sin on the Cross, the order of humankind to God is both restored and enhanced. And insofar as the Christian accepts the ills and evils of life in loving union with Christ, the Christian is able to participate in the obedience, trust,

[58] ST III, 1, 3.

and love that redeems the world. This does not mean, of course, that the believer understands the mysterious ways of God's providence. It is rather that evil and suffering cease to be punitive and alienating in living union with the One whose love has shown that God's power and goodness have overthrown evil and promised the ultimate triumph of good. These reminders of basic Christian doctrine is by way of concluding that the real answer to the problem of evil and the key to the will of God with respect to evil is Jesus Christ. All the classical Thomists knew this, and so do the contemporary ones who follow; it is just that the formalities of philosophy sometimes have obscured this basic truth.

## II. VARIATIONS ON THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

The foregoing classical approach hewed closely to the texts and language of Thomas Aquinas in the conviction that his basic insights were still viable in the twentieth century. In the eyes of other Thomists, however, those basic insights need to be re-worked, revised, and brought into dialogue with contemporary approaches to the problem of evil. The discussion will begin with two contemporary philosophers of religion who have used Aquinas as a resource to consider the problem of evil within the context of its formulations within the analytic tradition: Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump. As has been noted throughout this chapter, however, it is impossible to separate Thomistic theodicy completely from its theological context. Hence the second group of thinkers to be considered comprises the greatest Thomistic theologians of the latter half of the twentieth-century: Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx.[59]

### *A. Brian Davies*[60]

Brian Davies offers an approach to the problem of evil that relies heavily on Aquinas and some traditional Thomistic themes, but he developes a novel position because he challenges the presuppositions that generate what is commonly known as the problem of evil. The problem is typically generated by calling attention to the *prima facie* incompatibility of the existence of a good and omnipotent God, on the one hand, and suffering and evil on the other. Presumably, a good and omnipotent God could and would bring it about that his creatures would not suffer, especially on the scale that human beings do. Those who defend the existence of God do so by imputing to God some morally sufficient reason justifying the existence of evil, normally through some claim about the value of free will. What distinguishes Davies from other contemporary philosophers is that he rejects the challenge to find a morally sufficient reason for evil by denying the presumption that God is morally good and by arguing that the free will defense does not provide such a morally sufficient reason even if it were necessary (or even possible) to provide one.

[59] For the background on these, see Chapter One.

[60] His most developed presentation is "The Problem of Evil," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject*, ed. Brian Davies (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 163-201. The main outlines appeared earlier in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, New edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32-54. See also "How is God Love?" in *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition*, ed. Luke Gormally (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), 97-110.

It seems an odd way out of the problem of evil to deny that God is morally good. For while it does indeed dissolve the problem, it immediately raises the objection: Does that mean God is then morally bad? According to Davies, such an objection would miss the point:

> But should we begin by supposing that the goodness of God is moral goodness, or that God is a moral agent? I ask the question not in order to suggest that God is immoral or sub-moral, but in order to suggest that it is wholly inappropriate to think of God as something able to be either moral (well behaved) or immoral (badly behaved). I ask the question in order to suggest that both foes and friends of theism might do well to fight shy of statements like "God is a moral agent" or "God is morally good" (both of which I take to be equivalent to "God is well behaved").[61]

In making this claim, Davies appeals to Aquinas's doctrine of good that we have already seen in the classical account. "Good" is not a univocal predicate ascribing a single property to a subject, but rather a judgment that the subject in question is a perfected or actualized instance of its kind. In Davies's categories, "good" is an attributive adjective rather than a predicative adjective because it does not signify a common property shared by everything that has it, but rather has a meaning relative to the subject to which it is attributed. According to this doctrine, "good" need not mean "morally good like a human being" when applied to God. To say that God is good is fundamentally to say that God is perfect, pure act, or fully realized divinity. It also means that God is the causal source of goodness in creatures insofar as they display perfection and actuality in accord with their natures. Finally, to say that God is good is also to say that God is the ultimate object of all created striving insofar as every creature tries to become a fully-realized instance of its kind and so imitate God.

While we are tempted to think that fully realized divinity as the end of all striving must also be morally good as we understand it, nonetheless Davies wants to argue that we have no intelligible grounds to attribute to God the properties that normally undergird our attributions of moral goodness. God cannot have Aristotelian-style moral virtues because he does not have passions or dispositions. Davies acknowledges, however, that theists traditionally have ascribed the virtue of justice to God, and that that ascription has biblical warrant. If we take the Aristotelian definition of justice in order to see how it could apply to God, it is clear that God cannot enter into exchanges governed by commutative justice (buying and selling, for example) because this would imply the absurd premise that creatures had something proper to themselves that they could give to God and set up an obligation of return. The second kind of justice, distributive justice, can apply to God because it governs the way in which the ruler of a community distributes goods according to the needs and merits of community members. Justice in this sense and in a biblical sense can be attributed to God: "If we are entitled to call God just it can only be because he can be said to act in accordance with his own decrees (as revealed), or because he gives to his creatures what is

[61] "The Problem of Evil," 177-8.

good for them given their natures as made by him (this not implying that he give the same to every creature)."[62] But Davies wants to argue that attributing justice in this sense to God does not make God the bearer of moral duties or obligations so that there is some requirement on him to be morally good in that sense.

The fundamental reason for the unintelligibility of ascribing moral duties to God is that the concept of a duty presupposes some prior definite moral context or framework which specifies what agents owe one another. Yet God's relationship to creation is one of sovereign freedom. There is no moral law whereby God is bound to create at all or, even if he does decide to create, to set up some particular order. Rather than conceiving God as bound by some independent moral law in his dealings with creation, it is instead the case that creation sets up the moral laws and context for there to be duties and obligations. Against the obvious objection (which will be returned to later) that although God is under no moral obligation to create, nevertheless creation does set up a context in which God can intelligibly be considered to have moral obligations to act in certain ways (promote creatures' good, reward and punish good and evil), Davies says that because God is the transcendent creator and not an inhabitant of the created order, there is no intelligible way for us to ascribe to God the kinds of actions that normally count as fulfilling moral obligations. Davies ultimately argues that because God is the transcendent creator, any attempt to ascribe the kinds of properties to God that make created agents morally good is misguided:

> It has been said that error in philosophy often consists in exploring the details of a road one should never have turned into in the first place. I am suggesting that philosophers who argue for or against God's existence by concentrating on God's supposed moral goodness are well down such a road. They are like people attacking or defending tennis players because they fail to run a mile in under four minutes. Tennis players are not in the business of running four-minute miles. Similarly, God is not something with respect to which moral evaluation (whether positive or negative) is appropriate.[63]

Basically, ascribing moral goodness to God is a category mistake.

Even if it were necessary to defend God's moral integrity, Davies argues that anyone committed to the basic metaphysical picture of the God-world relationship ingredient in classical theism cannot subscribe to the contemporary free will defense. According to the standard version of the free will defense, classically formulated by Alvin Plantinga,[64] God could not have created a world which necessarily contained no evil because the only way to guarantee that humans never acted evilly would be to determine causally their wills. But if God causally determined a human will not to do evil, then that will would no longer be significantly free. So for the sake of the greater good of significant moral freedom, God leaves the human will independent of his causal power and self-determining; according to this view, divine causality and morally significant human freedom are

[62] Ibid., 179.
[63] Ibid., 182.
[64] *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 7-64.

incompatible. But Davies notes that this conception of human freedom is incompatible with the metaphysical claims of the classical conception that God is always the first cause of all being. Human actions have reality or being; hence they must be caused by God. To deny that human actions are caused by God is to deny that God is the cause of being. Moreover, and as noted above, to deny that God is the cause of human actions leads to making God passively depend upon creatures in order to know what they are doing. According to Davies, the free will defense is useless to any theist who holds a traditional doctrine of creation and providence.

Davies argues that the claim that God causes human actions is compatible with the claim that human beings are free in the sense of having a genuine two-way power to choose. Following Aquinas on this point, he says that the reason for this lies in the *sui generis* kind of causality proper to God as the transcendent Creator of the will. If the will were caused to act or choose by any external antecedent created cause, it would not be free. God's causality with respect to the will, however, is not that of a competing cause trying to override or co-opt the will by determining it, but rather God is the transcendent creator of the will whose causality is designed to enable the will to be what he creatively intends it to be: free. As we have seen all along, Aquinas's doctrine of providence presumes that God moves all creatures in accord with their natures; with respect to humans, God's providence is enacted through the free choices that we make under the movement of his will.

Davies knows, however, that to dissolve the post-Humean problem of evil is not to say that there is no intellectual or existential problem raised by the presence of evil in a world governed by a good and all-powerful God. Philosophy can make some helpful clarifications about this problem, but it cannot ultimately solve it. The basic distinction to be made in clarifying the problem is between "evil suffered" and "evil done." Evil suffered is "anything which can be thought of as diminishing or thwarting something."[65] All sorts of beings suffer evil in this way by the action of some other being, while only rational beings are capable of moral evil or evil done. In both cases, however, Davies makes the traditional claim that evil is a privation. Because evil is a privation or lack of being, it is not something that depends upon the causality of God because the latter bears only on what has some positive being. The explanation for evil suffered lies in some other created being's pursuit of what it takes to be its own good; there is always a natural explanation for evil suffered. As noted in the previous section, when it comes to evil suffered that is not attributable to moral evil, the evil in question is justified by an appeal to God's willing the goodness of the whole order with its variety of beings. Against the argument that there is too much evil suffered and too much pointless evil, Davies argues:

> But, if evil means "evil suffered", then there is no more evil than there need be. Any evil suffered that is *more than there need be* would be scientifically inexplicable. The evil suffered in the world is neither *more* nor *less* than what we can expect in a material world in which scientific explanations can be given for what happens. As we have seen, William Rowe thinks there are multitudes

[65] Ibid., 193.

> of instances of "seemingly pointless human and animal suffering that occur daily in our world." But no human or animal suffering is pointless if "pointless" means "lacking a natural explanation" and if the suffering in question is what I am calling "evil suffered." For a natural explanation is exactly what we are looking for when seeking to account for evil suffered. One might, perhaps, say that evil suffered could always be prevented by some constant series of miracles and that it is, for this reason, pointless (sometimes or always). But a world governed by a constant series of miracles would not be a material world. It would not be an object of scientific enquiry. It could, perhaps, have been created by God, but the fact of the matter is that it has not been. What God has created is a material world in which there is evil suffered. And in making this world to be, God is making what is good. Indeed, he is making nothing but what is good.[66]

Hence evil suffered poses no real problem for the theist. When it comes to moral evil, evil done, there seems to be a more difficult problem because there is no concomitant good that can be thought of as benefiting something. Moral evil harms both the agent and the victim by diminishing their being. But since the evil done is a privation in the action, it is not causally traceable to God.

Davies thinks that the real problem posed by evil occurs when we think of God's infinite range of creative or causal possibilities. Since God's creative choices are limited only by what can possibly be, God could have created a world in which no moral evil ever occured and no suffering ever occured. Both conditions are possible. Why didn't God actualize such a world? One answer is to say that such a world would be deprived of many goods that come out of evil and suffering, but this still leaves the original query intact. Another answer is to appeal to free will. But in addition to presuming the need to justify God's morality, this view fails to answer why there is moral evil because Davies thinks: "As far as I can see, God could have made a world in which people, angels, or any other creatures who might sensibly be thought of as moral agents (subject to duties, obligations and the like) always act well."[67] Why then has not God done so? Davies says that to seek an answer to this question is misguided because it presupposes that we can give reasons for acting in the case of God. God's transcendence, however, means that we cannot ask for his reasons like we can ask a human agent for his reasons. While God does have knowledge and will, he cannot be thought of as having the same kind of reasons that human moral agents have. In the end, we cannot understand why there is evil. But rather than casting doubt upon the existence of God, "it is something which invites us to reflect on the mystery of divinity, something which serves to remind us that God is nothing less than the beginning and end of all things, the source from which everything we can understand derives its existence."[68]

[66] Ibid., 195. The reference to Rowe indexes "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 126-137.

[67] Ibid., 197.

[68] Ibid., 198.

Davies's approach is bracing and provocative. It is bracing because it resolutely refuses to introduce theological premises that would make the job of considering evil easier. Without those premises, perhaps the final word does lie in mystery. In this context, however, Davies's two main arguments against more traditional approaches need to be evaluated. First, let us consider whether a Thomist ought to deny that God is morally good. Davies argues that God cannot be morally good in the sense of having moral virtue and claims Aquinas's mantle in this regard: "he [Aquinas] would have thought it quite blasphemous to suggest that God displays virtues."[69] This claim is not consonant with the texts, however, since Aquinas argues that the moral virtues can be attributed to God in the form of exemplar virtues.[70] When discussing God's justice, the most important moral virtue in this context, Aquinas says that while any moral virtue connected with the passions can only be metaphorically attributed to God, the moral virtues connected with the will and its acts can be attributed to God non-metaphorically or analogously; he specifically lists justice, liberality, and magnificence.[71] So Aquinas does consider the moral virtues to be attributable to God, especially when it comes to the will and its pre-eminent virtue of justice. As noted earlier, however, justice applies to God only in the sense of distributive justice. As ruler and orderer of the universe, it belongs to God's governance to distribute goods in accord with what is due to the creatures he has fashioned. Aquinas specifically addresses an objection to his position that sounds much like Davies: Justice is rendering what is due (*debitum*); but God can be debtor to no one; therefore justice is not applicable to God. To this Aquinas replies:

> It must be said that what is owed to someone is what is his own. This can even be applied to another person, when that person is ordered to someone like a slave to his master; but not vice-versa, since a free man acts for the sake of himself. The meaning of "due" presupposes an order of exigence or necessity wherein one thing is ordered to another. Now a twofold order is found in things. One, by which something created is ordered to some other creature: as when parts are ordered to the whole, accidents to substances, and anything to its own end. The other order is that whereby all created beings are ordered to God. Hence we can consider what is due in God's actions in two ways: either in terms of what is due God, or in terms of what is due to created things. And in both ways God gives what is due. It is due God that his wisdom and will be fullfilled in all things and that they manifest his goodness; in this sense of justice God renders what is due to himself, insofar as he gives to himself what is due. It is due to any created thing that it have what is ordered to itself, such that a man should have hands and that the beasts should serve him. And so God fufills justice when he gives to each what is due it according to its nature and condition. But this latter justice is based on the first since what God owes anything is based on how God has ordered it to himself according to divine wisdom. And so although in this way God gives to each what is due, he is not

[69] Ibid., 182.
[70] ST I-II, 61, 5.
[71] ST I, 21, 1.

> thereby a debtor because he is not ordered to anything else but rather all things are ordered to him. Hence God's justice is described both as giving what is due his own goodness and requital of merit.[72]

Hence there is a significant sense in which God is bound in justice to give what is due to a creature. This does not make him a debtor in any objectionable sense, however, since the act whereby he establishes what is owed to creatures is motivated by the free choice to manifest his own goodness in that order of creation; as Aquinas says in another place, the work of justice presupposes the work of mercy in creation itself.[73] Hence it seems that Davies is at odds with Aquinas himself in claiming that moral virtue cannot intelligibly be ascribed to God, and so it would seem that God could be called morally good.

There is also another reason for a Thomist to want to call God morally good, based on the doctrine of analogy worked out in the chapter on religious language. Briefly, Thomists hold that certain terms signifying pure spiritual perfections, such as good, can be truly predicated of God in a non-equivocal fashion. Such terms are not predicated of God in a univocal fashion, as if the terms had the same meaning, but rather in an analogical fashion. According to this view, when we say that God is good, we mean that God is truly good, indeed the exemplar and source of all created goodness, but we do not purport to know or understand what God's goodness is. Analogy is based on a transference of terms connoting spiritual perfections, as first known in creatures, to God as their primary instance and causal source.[74] Now since creaturely moral goodness is surely a spiritual perfection, it must have its exemplar source in God, even though God's moral goodness is not a state to be achieved through virtuous actions but rather identical with his very being. By reducing moral goodness to behavior in accord with virtue or moral obligation, Davies begs the question in favor of denying moral goodness to God. Davies correctly notes that goodness fundamentally means perfect actuality in being, but fails to see that that is precisely what the achievement of moral goodness is in a rational creature. So there do seem to be good grounds for wanting to claim that God is morally good, and the problem of evil would not dissolve so easily.[75]

Davies is surely right, however, that no Thomist could then have recourse to some version of the post-Plantinga free will defense because of its denial that a free human action can be caused by God. Yet Davies seems to go too far when he asserts that God could have made a world in which creatures had significant moral agency and there was no moral evil. He never explains how this is possible on Thomistic grounds. But if we presume that significant moral agency requires genuine freedom in the will, it does not follow from the fact that God causes every good human action to the conclusion that God can make a world in which free

[72] ST I, 21, 2.

[73] ST I, 21, 4.

[74] Davies does talk about the principle of causal likeness that undergirds the attribution of goodness to God, but he does not relate that discussion to analogy. See "The Problem of Evil," 187-190.

[75] One additional worry about Davies's position is that it seems to open the door towards voluntarism in its insistence that God is not bound by any moral law in the same way that he is bound by the logical law of non-contradiction. While it is true that God is not bound by an external moral law, God's actions are governed by his own goodness; which is, according to the doctrine of divine simplicity, identical with God's nature.

creatures never sin. The only way that God could do that would be by causally determining the human will in a way incompatible with the freedom of the will or creating creatures immediately in the beatific vision. Presuming that God moves the will to choose freely in accord with its nature, there is always the possibility of sin because it is of the very nature of a created will to be defectible. Therefore it does seem open to a Thomist to adopt a modified free will defense along the lines of the classical approach of the previous section.[76]

*B. Eleonore Stump*

The work of Eleonore Stump represents an attempt to develop a contemporary free will defense response to evil that mines the texts of Aquinas for support at nearly every turn. Stump situates her position over against the work of Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and John Hick; while sympathetic to their varied attempts to make morally significant human freedom the explanation for evil, she does not think that any of their positions ultimately is satisfactory.[77] What is distinctive about her approach is that she moves beyond the generic theistic problematic to consider evil from within a specifically Christian context by introducing three theological doctrines into the mix: the Fall of Adam, the consequent introduction of natural evil, and the ultimate destination of human beings in the afterlife to either heaven or hell. Because of the Fall, understood as the choice by the earliest human beings against God, our inherited human nature has been fundamentally altered so that our freedom of choice is severely debilitated. In contrast to our original condition, wherein we were disposed to will what we ought to (God as ultimate good), our wills are now disposed to will what they ought not to (pleasure or power). In this fallen state, human beings are not able to arrive at their beatitude by their own power. Presuming that we are fallen, the problem for God's love becomes how to remedy the defect such that we can arrive at heaven rather than hell in a way that respects our freedom.

Stump accepts Plantinga's account of the relationship between God and the human will: "If, as I think as has been argued elsewhere [by Plantinga], it is not logically possible for God to make human beings do anything freely, and if heaven is as I have described it, then it is not within God's power to insure that all human beings will be in heaven, because it is not within his power to determine what they freely will."[78] So God cannot act on the fallen will unilaterally to repair it without violating human freedom. But, on the other hand, a fallen will cannot repair itself by re-orientating itself to choose God. So there appears to be a dilemma: either God overrides our freedom and saves us, or God leaves us in our fallen freedom with its inevitable eventuation of moral evil and therefore hell. The way out of the dilemma is to argue that while fallen human beings cannot freely will their own self-repair, they can freely will that God fix their defective wills; to put the matter another way, a fallen human can have a second-order desire to have different first-order desires. In this way, according to Stump, both human freedom and the need for grace are safe-guarded and reconciled: we freely turn to God who responds by

[76] Davies would be right to object, however, that the classical approach presupposes theological premises that are inappropriate within the context of philosophy of religion.

[77] "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 392-423.

[78] Ibid., 400.

repairing our wills. Stump knows, however, that this account of the relationship between free will and grace is problematic within the context of traditional Thomistic interpretations; as she acknowledges, it looks like some version of Pelagianism insofar as it attributes to the human will the initial salvific movement toward God.[79] Stump defends her view as a more charitable reading of Aquinas, however, because it absolves him from the divine determinism associated with the Neo-Banezian position (as exemplied above in Nicolas and Garrigou-Lagrange). Once it is understood that our salvation depends upon our recognition that we need to turn to God to re-orientate our wills, Stump thinks the meaning of evil as suffering can be understood: "The fixing of a defective free will by a person's freely willing that God fix his will is, I think, the foundation of a Christian solution to the problem of evil."[80] The role that suffering plays in divine providence is to induce the sinner to recognize human depravity in general and his own in particular, and so turn to God for healing. Suffering is meant to humble the sinner with the truth of his own inability to better himself and the need to submit his will to God for repair. Suffering from both moral evil and natural evil conduce to the end of turning men to God: "But evil of this sort is the best hope, I think, and maybe the only effective means, for bringing men to such a state."[81] There is no guarantee that suffering will accomplish its goal of turning wills to God, however, because of human freedom.

Stump finds support for her central claim about the purpose of evil in Aquinas's biblical commentaries, especially on Job.[82] Aquinas approaches the book of Job as an extended debate on the role of suffering in divine providence. The false view refuted is that providence assigns adversities in life as a punishment for personal sins and prosperity as a reward for moral goodness. It is rather the case that God allows the worst sorts of adversities to befall even the virtuous for the sake of leading them to their ultimate end of heaven. It is central to this account that the meaning of suffering can only be grasped in relationship to our attainment of heavenly happiness; Aquinas's approach to evil is starkly and strangely (to us) otherworldly. The problem of evil arises when it is presumed that God ought to promote our earthly happiness, when in reality it is heavenly happiness that God is trying to promote. Suffering is the means to awaken in human beings a true recognition of their spiritual plight as fallen creatures in need of divine grace to reach heavenly happiness: "Aquinas thinks that pain and suffering of all sorts are God's medicine for this spiritual cancer."[83] The purpose of suffering is to induce in the sufferer some good – some change in the will or new dispositions like patience and humility – that better enables the sufferer to attain heaven by turning to God for grace. Even in those who have already turned to God and lead virtuous lives, suffering serves to make them more virtuous and heaven-directed; indeed, the

[79] "Atonement According to Aquinas," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 82-84.

[80] "The Problem of Evil." 409.

[81] Ibid., 409.

[82] "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Stump (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 328-357. The English translation is *Thomas Aquinas, The Literal Exposition on Job*, trans. Anthony Damico, interpretive essay and notes by Martin D. Yaffe, Classics in Religious Studies, No.7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

[83] Ibid., 340

better the person, the more likely that he will experience suffering so as to receive greater blessings in heaven. So not all suffering is meant to shock sinners into turning to God; for the already converted, suffering is a means of deeper conformity to Christ on the Cross.[84] For suffering to be justified in any case, it must work for the spiritual good of the sufferer's eventual attainment of union with God in heaven.

Stump acknowledges that there is something counter-intuitive or even repugnant about this interpretation of suffering, and she therefore addresses several objections. First, this view seems to deny that human suffering is really an evil. But this is not true because suffering in itself is evil in Stump's account; it is only justified conditionally in the light of the spiritual benefit it offers to the sufferer. Yet if suffering is an evil, then God looks immoral for willing an evil for the sake of the good; even God cannot directly will evil that good may come of it. Stump's reply to this objection is complex. She argues that God never directly wills suffering qua evil for its own sake, but only "insofar as it is a means to an end"[85]; i.e., only insofar as it is ordered to the spiritual betterment of the sufferer. It seems as if suffering can be willed by God precisely as connected to a spiritual good for the sufferer. Against the objection that such spiritual medicine seems largely ineffective, Stump argues that even though we may not see any spiritual betterment, this does not mean that there is not some spiritual good being achieved. Even in the hard case of suffering infants, it is possible that God can bring some spiritual good out of it, however mysterious this may seem to us; we will never be able to judge the results of suffering in a person's spiritual life. It might be objected that some forms of suffering seem so horrendous that God could never be justified in incorporating them into his providence, but given the stakes – eternal life – it would seem that any form of suffering could be justified. It could also be objected that this doctrine encourages human beings to be passive in the face of evil for fear of interfering in God's redemptive work. Stump denies this objection. Human beings have a moral and Gospel obligation to alleviate suffering wherever possible; they can never presume to judge that any instance of suffering in another is some kind of divine therapy because only God can know this. Nor can a human being presume to participate in the redemption of another through the infliction of suffering because only God can do this.

The doctrine of hell poses a special problem because it is a non-therapeutic infliction of punitive suffering by God which seems therefore pointless and contrary to God's loving goodness. Stump argues, however, that a Dantean version of hell is justified according to the account of divine love and goodness given by Aquinas.[86] To love another person is to will the good for the sake of that other person; it is to will that the person be fulfilled in accord with human nature. Love

[84] Stump has taken pains to amend her earlier identification of the purpose of suffering with the conversion of the fallen. As noted here, that sort of account cannot explain the suffering of the righteous. Between "The Problem of Evil" and "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," Stump revised her views in "Providence and the Problem of Evil" in *Christian Philosophy*, ed. Thomas P. Flint (Notre Dame: University Notre Dame Press, 1990), 51-91. This work makes some important clarifications of her position under the influence of Aquinas's doctrine of providence.

[85] Ibid., 347.

[86] "Dante's *Hell*, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1986): 181-198.

is also unitive; it seeks to promote a union of wills in friendship. God's love, therefore, wills the good for all human beings by desiring that their wills seek fulfillment through obedience and friendship with him. Any dweller in hell is there, however, precisely because that person has freely and definitively chosen against such a relationship with God as ultimate good in favor of the pursuit of some other end. Such a person would have developed a set of vicious dispositions and deformations of character as a result of having led a disordered life. Stump argues that God cannot fulfill such characters with himself against their wills because that would violate human freedom. Nor can God annihilate them, because that would entail a diminution of being and goodness. Hence the fittingness of a Dantean hell because:

> On Dante's view, what God does with the damned is treat them according to their *second* nature, the acquired nature that they have chosen for themselves. He confines them within a place where they can do no more harm to the innocent. In this way he recognizes their evil nature and shows that he has care for it, because by keeping the damned from doing further evil, he prevents their further disintegration, their further loss of goodness and of being. He cannot increase or fulfill the being of the damned; but by putting restraints on the evil they can do, he can maximize their being by keeping them from additional decay. In this way, then, he shows love – Aquinas's sort of love – for the damned.[87]

In addition to preventing the damned from harming others and diminishing themselves further, a Dantean hell also lovingly provides the damned with the opportunity to act in accord with their freely chosen second natures. Stump explains:

> Because of the nature he has given himself, the closest Filippo Argenti can come to the natural functioning of a human being is to act in wrath. By granting him a place in which to exercise his wrathfulness, God allows him as much being, and thus as much goodness, as Filippo is capable of. God does what he can, then, to preserve and maximize Filippo's being and the being of each of the damned. In so doing, he treats the damned according to their nature and promotes their good; and because he is goodness itself, by maximizing the good of the damned, he comes as close as he can to uniting them with himself – that is to say, he loves them.[88]

According to Stump, then, hell is the state where those whom God cannot unite to himself because they have chosen otherwise live in a state determined by their own disordered choices. Hell is intrinsically painful because it is fundamentally disordered and self-frustrating, yet it is nonetheless the best state possible for the persons having chosen thus, assuming that annihilation is not an option.[89]

[87] Ibid., 196-7.
[88] Ibid., 197.
[89] The only Thomist that I know of who advocates annihilation rather than hell is Edward Schillebeeckx in *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1990),

Stump summarizes her version of the free will solution thus:

> Because it is a necessary condition for union with God, the significant exercise of free will employed by human beings in the process which is essential for their being saved from their own evil is of such great value that it outweighs all the evil of the world.[90]

Stump's solution is her own; that is, she does not offer it as an interpretation of Aquinas. Yet she has frequent recourse to Aquinas, and offers her solution as one that has deep affinities with Aquinas. On at least two central points, however, there are good reasons to worry that she has offered skewed readings of Aquinas in order to enlist him in her own solution. The first is her construal of the relationship between divine causality and free will. Stump accepts the view common to contemporary free will defenses that God cannot cause the will to choose without compromising morally significant freedom in the libertarian sense. As we have seen throughout this chapter, however, most Thomists traditionally follow Aquinas in espousing a strong view of divine causality, especially with respect to willing the good. When it comes to the *crux interpretatum* of the relationship between grace and free will, Stump's "charitable" reading of Aquinas as allowing a kind of priority to the human will in turning to God for grace is not charitable to Aquinas insofar as it omits what Aquinas has to say about the priority of God's grace in the act of conversion. Stump ignores Aquinas's texts on operative grace and focuses instead on what is called cooperative grace. In distinguishing the two, however, Aquinas writes:

> Grace can be said in two senses. In one sense, it designates the divine assistance whereby God moves us to will and do good; in another sense, it means the habitual gift implanted in us by God. In both senses grace can be conveniently divided into operative and cooperative grace. For the operation of some effect is not attributed to the moved, but rather to the mover. In that effect in which our mind is moved without being a mover, God alone moving, the operation is attributed to God, and this is called operative grace. In that effect in which our minds are both moved and movers, the operation is not attributed solely to God, but also to the soul, and this is called cooperative grace. Now there are two kinds of will acts. The first is the interior act of the will. When it comes to this act, the will is related as moved to God as mover, especially when we begin to will the good after previously willing evil. Insofar as God moves the human mind to that kind of act, this is said to be operative grace.[91]

134-139. He argues that if communion with God is the ground of eternal life, and the damned are excluded from this by their own choice, then they should suffer the biblical "second death" (Rev. 20:6) of annihilation.

[90] "The Problem of Evil," 415-6.

[91] ST I-II, 111, 2.

This representative text clearly makes the point that it is God's grace that moves the will of the sinner to conversion; to ascribe a capacity for such turning to God apart from grace is indeed, as Stump anticipates, to hold some kind of Pelagian position. When it comes to the grace of conversion and justification, which is what operative grace effects, the will is moved rather than moving; it is only subsequently, as already justified, that the person is a mover under grace. And yet Aquinas believed that God's operative grace is compatible with freedom of choice: God moves the will to freely choose him.[92] As Davies noted in the previous section, a Thomist cannot subscribe to the view of freedom ingredient in contemporary versions of the free will defense and still be faithful to Aquinas's metaphysical view of the relationship between God and creatures.

The second major point of contention concerns the relationship of human suffering to the will of God. According to Stump, "Aquinas thinks that pain and suffering of all sorts are God's medicine for this spiritual cancer [the state of original sin]."[93] She cites numerous texts where Aquinas says something like this, but the texts where Aquinas attributes the cause of human suffering to God concern *malum poena*, not *malum culpa*. Stump's discussion runs together "all sorts of suffering" in a way that ignores the traditional concern to distinguish between God's relationship to penal evil and moral evil. God is the cause of our suffering the infirmities of our bodily condition as a penal sanction for the sake of his justice, and in his mercy he does bring good out of what we suffer in this way by inducing good dispositions in us. But when it comes to what we suffer as a result of the moral evil of others, God is in no way the cause of that suffering. The suffering inflicted by evil people on the innocent is not God's "medicine." The fundamental Augustinian axiom governing Aquinas's discussion is that God permits evil because he can bring good out of it. He does not will evil for the sake of the good, or as a means to the good, but rather causes good to come out of evil. God can turn the suffering inflicted on a person by another's moral evil into an occasion of spiritual good for that person, especially in union with the suffering of Christ, but God does not inflict such suffering like a doctor prescribing a painful cure. Stump's failure to distinguish between the different relationships that God has to suffering, depending upon its origin, lays the ultimate responsibility for too much evil on God's doorstep. As Schillebeeckx would argue, Stump does not do enough to distance God from the suffering that human beings inflict on one another, and she does not do enough to stress God's will to oppose suffering and evil. As Rahner would argue, Stump tries to explain too much.

[92] ST I-II, 113, 3. The best single book on the problem is Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas*.

[93] "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," 340

*C. Bernard Lonergan*

Lonergan discusses the traditional problem of evil in his consideration of the notion of God in *Insight*.[94] While Lonergan eschews traditional Thomistic language, his doctrine echoes many of the themes we have seen in the tradition.[95] He begins by making distinctions between three different kinds of evil. First, there is basic sin as "the failure of free will to choose a morally obligatory course of action or its failure to reject a morally reprehensible course of action."[96] Basic sin is a kind of fundamental irrationality, a failure or "contraction" of consciousness to reflect on what it ought to consider before it proceeds to action. Basic sin is thus very much like the traditional Thomistic explanation of sin as rooted in the will's failure to consider the appropriate rule of action. What results from basic sin is the second kind of evil, moral evil, the actual personal sins of action or omission. Thirdly, there is physical evil, which Lonergan attributes to the evolution of the world through emergent probabilities; since the less developed manifold always precedes the more developed higher unities, there are inevitably breakdowns and failures in the physical universe.

The key to Lonergan's reconciliation between God's universal providence and evil is to argue that because basic sin is an irrational failure to reflect on what one ought to do, it cannot have a cause and so cannot be traced back to God:

> Now if basic sin is simply irrational, if understanding it consists in grasping that it has no intelligibility, then clearly it cannot be in intelligible dependence on anything else. But what cannot be in intelligible dependence on anything else, cannot have a cause; for cause is correlative with effect; and an effect is what is in intelligible dependence on something else. Finally, if basic sins cannot have a cause, God cannot be their cause. Nor does this conclusion contradict our earlier affirmation that every event is caused by God. For basic sin is not an event; it is not something that positively occurs; on the contrary, it consists in a failure of occurrence, in the absence in the will of a reasonable response to an obligatory motive.[97]

In describing the relationship of God's will to basic sin, Lonergan says that it is necessary to come up with a third category, between what God positively wills and what God does not will, and so he reverts to the traditional language of permission; God forbids but permits basic sin.

Lonergan ultimately appeals to the traditional good of created freedom to justify God's permission of evil:

> Clearly, it is not evil but good to create a being so excellent that it possesses rational self-consciousness when freedom naturally follows. It is not evil but

[94] *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, revised student edition (London: Longmans, 1958), 666-669. There is also a consideration of evil under the aspect of "special transcendental knowledge" in Chapter Twenty, but this discussion is far too complex and diffuse to be recapitulated here.

[95] For a comparison of Lonergan and Maritain, see David J. Higgins, "Evil in Maritain and Lonergan," in *Jacques Maritain: The Man and his Metaphysics*, 235-242.

[96] Ibid., 666.

[97] Ibid., 667.

> good to leave that freedom intact, to command good indeed and to forbid evil, but to refrain from an interference that would reduce freedom to illusory appearance. Consequently, it is not evil but good to conceive and effect a world order, even though basic sins will and do occur.[98]

According to Lonergan, however, physical evil and moral evil are not really evils because they are intelligible and so good; only basic sin is truly evil. Physical evil is intelligible and good because it leads to a higher order. According to Lonergan, moral evil also leads to development: "even moral evils through the dialectical tension they generate lead either to their own elimination or to a reinforcement of the moral good."[99] This denial that physical evil and especially moral evil are genuine evils is hard to make sense of. How can moral evil be intelligible if its ultimate cause (basic sin) is unintelligible? How can moral evil and the horrific suffering it has produced not be evil? What is the "dialectical tension" generated by moral evil? What is the evidence that it leads to the elimination of evil and the reinforcement of the moral good? History seems to indicate otherwise. Lonergan's optimism about moral progress in nature and human history seems to lack any rational grounds.[100]

*D. Karl Rahner*

Rahner's central treatment of the problem of evil is entitled "Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer?."[101] While Rahner recognizes the legitimacy of the traditional care to distinguish in God's will between causing and permitting, he regards that distinction as peripheral to the real problem of the relationship of God to all forms of suffering. Since the difference between causing and permitting seems to do little work in explaining the relationship of all suffering to God's will, Rahner focuses instead on why God "allows" (*lassen*) suffering at all. He acknowledges that there is legitimacy in the traditional distinction between the suffering that originates from freely chosen sin (*malum culpae*) and the suffering that is not obviously connected to personal sin (which the tradition identified as punishment for original sin). Rahner argues, however, that since these two kinds of suffering are inextricably intertwined and causally interdependent, they can legitimately be subsumed under one generic category of suffering.

Rahner surveys traditional theistic answers to the problem of suffering and finds them all wanting. The first approach is to consider suffering as the inevitable byproduct of the evolution of the material world with a wide variety of beings. Rahner rejects this approach because it tries to treat freely initiated evil like natural evil; the evil that befalls material beings in their mutual struggle to survive is not the same as what produced the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Rahner then considers the traditional free will approach; although he does not attribute it to anyone in particular, it is clear that he has in mind the classical Thomistic view outlined in

[98] Ibid., 668.

[99] Ibid.

[100] For an attempt to argue for the superiority of a Lonerganian approach to evil, see "Philosophy-of-God, Theology, and the Problems of Evil," Michael Vertin, *Laval théologique et philosophique* 37 (1981): 15-31.

[101] *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 19, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 194-208.

the first section. Rahner argues that the classical approach cannot absolve God by attributing all evil to the initiatives of the human will because the human will is itself embraced by God's providence. Because of its strong doctrine of providence, the classical view cannot attribute to the human will complete causal origination of anything: "the creature's freedom is not so absolute and underivable as is assumed in this arrogant conception, which refuses to admit that in the last resort there cannot be something in the world that is independent of God, that even this free decision of the creature cannot be made by the latter entirely alone and with an absolutely undivided responsibility."[102] Because human freedom is *created* freedom, always dependent upon the provident power of God, it cannot be described as originating evil independently from God. Since we are free and responsible, we cannot shift off responsibility for evil onto God, but because God is creator, we cannot deny that evil is embraced by God's providence. Rahner offers no theoretical resolution to the problem of the *prima facie* incompatibility between divine causality and human freedom because he does not think it possible to give one; both poles must be maintained, but how is a mystery. So while the history of created freedom provides a partially valid explanation for the problem of evil, it is not a final or complete answer because created freedom is subsumed into divine freedom in the mystery of God's providence. Rahner then goes on to say that the attempt to explain suffering as a means of producing moral maturity (soul-making theodicy) is undermined by the excess of pointless suffering which marks human history; only "a noble mind untouched by any real distress, practicing spiritual massage in an ivory tower" could dare to proffer such an explanation. Finally, Rahner rejects the idea that suffering is justified in the light of eternal life, since, as Ivan famously argued in *The Brothers Karamazov*, no amount of heavenly bliss could justify the terrible history of terrestrial cruelty.

Rahner thinks all traditional theodicies fail because they try to explain what cannot ultimately be explained: the mystery of God's sovereign freedom as expressed in God's providence. While the appeal to human freedom is a partial explanation of human suffering, that freedom is subsumed into the larger and incomprehensible freedom of God. Fundamentally, the mistake made by all traditional forms of theodicy is to forget the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility. The incomprehensibility of God, whom Rahner typically describes as the Holy Mystery, is one of the most basic themes in all of Rahner's theology and one which he traces back to Aquinas himself.[103] In order to appreciate the meaning and import of divine imcomprehensiblity, we have to see it not as one attribute among others, but rather as a kind of meta-attribute governing everything we say about God when we assign him attributes. It is not just a feature of God's internal being, but also a feature of God's activity in creation and providence.[104] In response to evil, the believer is called to surrender in love to the Holy Mystery of God wherein suffering does not get explained, but rather is no longer a scandal in our existence or a problem because it is seen as part of the incomprehensible Mystery of God that is the ground of our being. Thus the incomprehensiblity of suffering is part of

[102] Ibid., 201.

[103] See pp. 47–48 on the *via negativa*.

[104] See "The Human Question of Meaning in the Face of the Absolute Mystery of God," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 18, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 89-104.

the incomprehensibility of God; it is the way that the incomprehensiblity of God is manifested in human history. Almost ironically, however, Rahner comes close to offering something like a traditional theodicy when he explains that our experience of incomprehensible suffering is necessary to instill in us a sense of God's own incomprehensibility:

> Without wanting to introduce a logical system of assumptions and conclusions, it might be said at most that, concretely, within our existence which can be realized only historically in freedom, suffering is unavoidable insofar as its absence would mean that God would not be taken seriously as the incomprehensible mystery with which we have to cope here and now, but would remain an abstract theorem giving us no further trouble in the concreteness of our life. In the actual course of our existence the fact is that the acceptance of God as the intractable mystery and the silent acceptance of the inexplicability and unanswerability of suffering are one and the same event.[105]

Rahner denies there is a logical connection between inexplicable human suffering and God's incomprehensiblity, but his account seems to link the two in a strong and almost necessary fashion. Rahner seems to want to have it both ways: there is no theodicy in the traditional sense, since there is no humanly comprehensible answer to the problem of evil, but there is a kind of explanation of inexplicable suffering as a fitting manifestation of the incomprehensiblity of God.

*E. Edward Schillebeeckx*

The final section of Schillebeeckx's massive *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*[106] is an extended theological discussion of the meaning of salvation in Christ in the light of the questions posed by the barbarous excess of unmerited and senseless suffering in human history. Schillebeeckx critiques all efforts at theodicy on the grounds that such evil resists rational explanation. Rather than attempt to offer a futile theoretical response to the mystery of evil, the main human task is practical: to oppose and alleviate evil wherever it is found. Having said this, however, Schillebeeckx asserts that recourse to the fundamental insights of Aquinas are necessary to think aright about the mystery of evil:

> I think that at this point it would be good to resort to Thomas Aquinas. . . . he does seem to me one of the few people who can give us some reasonably satisfactory viewpoints which at the same time leave all the darkness in its incomprehensibility. More than anyone else, Thomas stresses the priority of the all-determining, positive "first causality" of God. On the one hand as a theologian he dares to write: "The first cause of the lack of grace lies in us"; and on the other, as a philosopher: "Although God is the cause of our will by creating it from nothing, nevertheless this being-from-nothing belongs to the will in its own right rather than as from God; hence any defect of the will that belongs to it because it is created from nothing cannot be traced to a higher

[105] "Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer?," 206-7.
[106] Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

> cause"; here we have finitude, as it were, as the "first cause." As soon as there are *creatures*, there is the *possibility* (not the necessity) of a negative and original *initiative of finitude*, if I can put it that way.[107]

Here we see Schillebeeckx appealing to the same themes as classical Thomists like Jacques Maritain: God the Creator is the first cause of all good, while created freedom is the origin of negativity and evil.

Schillebeeckx does not think that it is possible to discuss God's relationship to evil through a generic analysis of God's goodness, but rather only by recourse to faith claims about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Schillebeeckx is critical of the traditional doctrine of God's "permissive will" because it makes God ultimately responsible for evil and obscures God's active opposition to evil:

> For it emerges that God transcends these negative aspects in our history, not so much by allowing them as *by overcoming them*, making them as though they had not happened. By nature, and in addition to other aspects and meanings, the resurrection of Jesus is also a corrective, a victory over the negativity of suffering and even death. From the point of view of the Christian Bible, for anyone who thinks historically it is not a question of "divine permission" for evil and unmerited suffering (this is the initiative of finitude), but of God's *victory* over this particular initiative of the finite. Only *in* the overcoming of it can we say that the negative aspects in our history have an indirect role in God's plan of salvation: *God is the Lord of History*.[108]

Suffering and evil become a part of God's plan only insofar as God overcomes them, not as divinely willed means to the end. The suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross was the result of human evil, not the will of God; it becomes part of God's saving plan only insofar as God triumphs over human evil. Jesus himself never offered a general theoretical explanation for human suffering, but rather in his person showed that God was actively opposed to human suffering in all its forms. And in raising Jesus from the dead, God has shown that the mystery of mercy is ultimately more powerful than the mystery of evil, even if we cannot fathom how. Here, at the mystery of Christ as the ultimate answer of God to the problem of evil, is where all Thomists want to leave the reader.

[107] Ibid., 728. The emphasis is Schillebeeckx's. The first quotation is from ST I-II, 112, 3. The second quotation is II Sent. d. 37, q.2, a.1, ad 2; I have substituted my own translation.

[108] Ibid., 729. Emphasis in original.

# 6. Religion and Morality

Thomas Aquinas never articulated a systematic account of a purely philosophical ethics. When writing in his own name, as opposed to commenting on Aristotle, Aquinas's interest in ethical matters is always explicitly framed by his understanding of moral science as part of the larger project of theology as *sacra doctrina*.[1] In the course of articulating a moral theology, Aquinas makes systematic use of some basic Aristotelian philosophical categories and doctrines from the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Indeed, the explicitly moral section of the *Summa theologiae*, the Second Part, begins with a consideration of beatitude and is structured according to a treatment of the virtues. This heavy reliance on Aristotle, along with what appears to be a relative reticence to incorporate specifically Christian doctrines into the discussion, has led some to conclude that Thomistic moral theology is really just a lightly baptized version of Aristotelian ethics. Yet as Servais Pinckaers has shown, Aquinas's moral thought is fundamentally evangelical when properly and holistically understood.[2] At the heart of Aquinas's vision is not Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, but rather the Beatitudes of the Gospels; the primary resource for moral action is not acquired Aristotelian virtue, but the grace of the Holy Spirit poured out into the hearts of believers through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the primary law is not some version of Stoic natural law, but rather the new law of the gospel. Aquinas's moral thinking is thus fundamentally Christian, and all the philosophical categories he employs are at the service of his theological purposes. Since the time of Aquinas, however, Thomists have argued about whether it is possible to construct a purely philosophical ethics by abstracting elements from Thomas's moral theology. Does Aquinas's moral theology make a philosophical ethics possible and even necessary, or does it render such an enterprise impossible and even dangerously misconceived? This is the basic problem that emerges out of the interplay between religion and morality within Thomism and provides the focus for this chapter.

The mainstream position within twentieth-century Thomism has been that it is indeed possible to extract an ethics from Aquinas's moral theology, and that it is

[1] See the account of *sacra doctrina* in Chapter Two.

[2] Servais Pinckaers, O.P., trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), see especially 168-190. Pinckaers is the pre-eminent contemporary interpreter of Aquinas's moral thought.

indeed necessary to do so. The reasons for extracting and constructing such a philosophy are not often explicitly reflected upon, but several concerns seem to motivate such efforts. One obvious reason is that Thomistic philosophy as a systematic worldview would be incomplete without an ethics. No philosophy could claim some sort of perennial status without an ethics! Second, Thomists have seen the need to find a way to enter into moral dialogue with non-Thomists and non-believers. Once the public square is naked, it is necessary for religious adherents to argue rationally for their views without explicit appeal to theological claims if they hope to persuade other people and influence the public debate; this is where the appeal to natural law is especially important. Recalling what was established earlier in Chapter Two about the relationship between faith and reason, it is ingredient in the Thomistic view that at least some of the truth claims advanced by believers can be established on rational grounds, including moral truths. As noted earlier also, one of the functions of reason is to defend religious truth claims. Hence there is the need to defend the rationality of some Christian moral claims against arguments designed to exhibit their irrationality. Finally, one last reason to construct a philosophical ethic is so that it can serve as an intellectual foil for moral theology. Thereby can it be shown how grace both perfects rather than destroys nature, and how grace goes beyond the natural.

Motivated by all or some of these concerns, Thomists have offered various construals of Thomistic ethics. According to most such reconstructions, Aquinas's ethics turns out to be very much like the eudaimonism of Aristotle; this resemblence is not surprising, given Aquinas's obvious and acknowledged debt to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to this view, Aquinas's ethics is theocentric insofar as philosophical contemplation of the divine provides the *telos* of man's ethical striving, the principle component of *eudaimonia*, and the norm for the discussions of human action and virtue. In the first part of what follows, I shall provide an overview of Thomistic eudaimonism in its various forms with special attention being paid to the role of God in such reconstructions.

The very possibility of a Thomistic philosophical eudaimonism has been questioned, however, on the grounds that it is irreparably at odds with the basic presuppositions of Aquinas's moral theology. First and foremost, such eudaimonism depends upon the claim that human beings have a natural completion or beatitude that can be achieved by autonomous human action. Yet this appears to conflict with (1) Aquinas's claim that human nature can only find its completion in the supernatural state of the beatific vision, and (2) the claim that any God-centered moral action can only be sustained by divine assistance (grace) because of man's moral debilitation as a result of the Fall of Adam and Eve (Original Sin). In the light of these considerations, some have argued that a Thomistic philosophical eudaimonism is incompatible with Thomas's moral theology because it substitutes a false natural end for the real supernatural end, and because it presupposes a moral optimism about human action that is incompatible with the theological picture of fallen human nature. In brief, this reading of Aquinas claims that it is impossible for there to be a Thomistic philosophical eudaimonism, and that such a theory would be dangerous because it proposes a false view of human nature and human destiny. This radical critique of the very possibility of a Thomistic ethic, first

adumbrated by Jacques Maritain and recently developed at length by Denis Bradley, will be the focus of the second section of the chapter.

Along with the debates about eudaimonism, Thomistic thinkers have also focussed attention on the possibility of abstracting Aquinas's account of natural law from its theological setting and offering it as the framework for a presentation of an authentically Thomistic ethic.[3] In the last twenty years or so, there has been animated discussion among Thomists about whether this is possible and how it could work in the light of worries about the naturalistic fallacy. While the major focus of debate has been on how the first principles of the natural law are known, within our context the more important question concerns the very possibility of presenting a natural law position without its theological background. What does natural law presuppose regarding divine law? How is it related to eternal law? How is it related to the revealed moral law embodied in the Ten Commandments? Does natural law presuppose some knowledge of God? Does it presuppose God as an end to be pursued? A discussion of these topics will be the subject of the third and final section of this chapter.

## I. THOMISTIC EUDAIMONISM

The question of happiness or beatitude is at the center of Aquinas's moral theology. The primacy of the end (*telos*) of human existence is evident in the way Aquinas situates his discussion of beatitude at the very beginning of the explicitly moral part (*Secunda Pars*) of the *Summa theologiae*. Beatitude is first not simply in the genetic or sequential sense as the first topic to be treated, but more importantly it is first in that it logically governs Aquinas's treatment of every other topic in the *Secunda Pars*. As he puts it in the prologue to the first question of the *Secunda Pars*: "What must be considered first is the ultimate end of human life and then the means whereby humans either achieve their end or fall short of it, for it is from the end that we derive our understanding of those things that are ordered to the end." It is the end of human life that provides the criteria for determining the goodness or badness of an action, which dispositions are virtues because they facilitate action towards the end and which are vices because they prompt actions away from the end, and the role of law as a principle directing us to our end. Beatitude is thus the ultimate explanatory category (the cause of all causes) governing the entire structure of Aquinas's moral thought.

As noted in the introduction, it is often erroneously assumed that the primacy of beatitude in Aquinas's moral thought is a function of his desire to correlate Christian morality with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. On the contrary, Aquinas's primary motivation for organizing his moral science around the concept of beatitude is theological rather than philosophical. As Pinckaers has shown, Aquinas makes beatitude the focal point of his moral teaching because he believes

[3] The attempt to focus on natural law as the primary category for Thomistic ethics appears to be at odds with Aquinas's preference for a virtue-centered ethic. The relationship between natural law and virtue has been a point of dispute among Thomists, but in this context we must leave that debate aside. Pinckaers's account of how natural law and virtue functions within Aquinas's moral theology is surely correct.

it is the focal point of Christ's moral teaching.[4] Aquinas interprets Christ's Sermon on the Mount as a teaching about beatitude, and so Pinckaers asserts that "The *Secunda Pars* is for Thomas a commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, following upon the revelation of the true beatitude."[5] The New Law of grace is the revelation of both the end and the means whereby human beings find their beatitude in the God of Jesus Christ. The beatitude envisioned in the *Secunda Pars* is thus theological and theocentric. Human beings made in the image and likeness of God are meant to find fulfillment in the vision of God in heaven, and the life of the theological virtues (faith, hope, and love); the infused moral virtues; the gifts and beatitudes; the New Law of Grace; the sacraments; and the Church are all the inchoation and the promise of that ultimate fulfillment.

In the question devoted explicitly to the essence of human beatitude, Aquinas asserts that "ultimate and perfect beatitude can only be found in the vision of the divine essence."[6] Aquinas is something of an intellectualist about beatitude because he thinks its primary component is an act of intellectual vision of the divine. That kind of knowledge can only be enjoyed in the beatific vision of heaven, however, and it therefore presupposes the action of God elevating and illuminating the human intellect so that it can enjoy a cognitive state that, as a sharing in God's own self-knowledge, transcends the natural capacities of the human intellect.[7] The cogency of Aquinas's argument that human beatitude is found in a vision of the divine essence, for which we have both some kind of capacity and some kind of desire, has been debated by Thomists ever since the time of Aquinas and will be considered in the next section.[8] In this context, however, what is important is to note that embedded within Aquinas's account of supernatural beatitude is a reference to another sense of beatitude that can be known philosophically and apparently achieved without the special assistance of divine grace:

> As noted earlier, there is a twofold human beatitude or felicity. One is proportioned to human nature, and man can arrive at it through the resources of his own nature. The other is a beatitude that exceeds human nature which man can arrive at only by divine power according to a certain participation in divinity.[9]

The natural beatitude of the human person is differentiated from the supernatural as the imperfect from the perfect. As Aquinas describes such a life, the speculative contemplation of God as First Cause is the primary activity, and subordinate to this

[4] "La béatitude dans l'éthique de Saint Thomas" in *The Ethics of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. L.J. Elders and K. Hedwig, *Studii Tomistici* 25 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984), 80-94. See also the earlier reference to *Sources of Christian Ethics*.

[5] "La béatitude dans l'éthique de Saint Thomas," 89. The translation is mine.

[6] ST I-II, 3, 8.

[7] ST I, 12.

[8] The best study of the question is Jorge Laporta, *La destinée de la nature humaine selon Thomas d'Aquin*, Études de philosophie médiévale, 55 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1965). A fuller discussion of the relationship between human nature and the beatific vision is central to the next chapter on Human Nature and Destiny.

[9] ST I-II, 62, 1. The reference is to the same doctrine in the earlier 5, 5.

is practical activity as regulated by the moral virtues.[10] Aquinas explicitly correlates this account of imperfect beatitude with Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, 7-8:

> We admit unconditionally that the beatitude of man is after this life. But we do not deny, however, that a kind of sharing in beatitude is possible in this life, insofar as man is perfect principally in the goods of speculative reason and secondarily in the goods of practical reason. The Philosopher [Aristotle] discusses this latter kind of felicity in the *Ethics*; the former kind of happiness, which is beyond this life, he neither asserts nor denies.[11]

This twofold account of human beatitude, with its explicit correlation of imperfect beatitude with Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, has been taken to be grounds for the construction of a Thomistic eudaimonistic ethic based on elements of Aquinas's eudaimonisitc moral theology. The classic twentieth-century Neoscholastic example of this sort of approach can be seen in the monumental multivolume commentary on Aquinas's discussion of beatitude by Santiago Ramirez: *De hominis beatitudine*.[12] While acknowledging that Aquinas's discussion of beatitude is fundamentally theological, Ramirez nonetheless argues that Aquinas's discussion of natural beatitude can serve as a basis for a Thomistic philosophical ethic. Such an ethic would be theocentric insofar as it regards the ultimate natural telos of human activity to be philosophical contemplation of God as First Cause. A structurally similar approach can also be found in A.D. Sertillanges's *La philosophie morale de saint Thomas d'Aquin*.[13] In response to Jacques Maritain's critique of the classical approach to Thomistic ethics, which will be discussed in the next section, Sertillanges argues that Aquinas's doctrine of man's natural beatitude allows for the abstraction of a moral philosophy, and that such a moral philosophy presupposes the theistic claims established by general metaphysics and rational theology.[14] According to this way of thinking, while a Thomistic ethic would not presuppose a revealed theology, it would presuppose the conclusions of metaphysics or natural theology.[15]

The systematic problem that dogged Thomists in their efforts to present an autonomous ethic was that its results looked like diluted or truncated versions of Aquinas's moral theology. The treatments tended to follow the order of the *Secunda Pars* and presume, without any attempt at justification, that it was unproblematically possible to abstract and concatenate sections of that work into a systematic Thomistic ethic. It was one of the virtues of Wolfgang Kluxen's *Philosophische Ethik bei Thomas von Aquin*[16] that it challenged the naive methodological presuppositions of traditional accounts of Thomistic ethics. Kluxen

[10] ST I-II, 3, 5. This would make Aquinas a "dominant end" interpreter of Aristotle.

[11] IV Sent. d.49, g.1, a.1, sol 4.

[12] Volume III in his *Opera omnia*, ed. Victorino Rodriguez, O.P. (Madrid: Consejo Suerior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1972).

[13] Revised edition (Paris: J. Aubier, 1942).

[14] Ibid., II.

[15] See Chapter Two, pp. 37–38.

[16] Originally published in 1963, it has recently been reprinted in a revised third edition (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1998).

acknowledges that Thomas's systematic approach was intrinsically theological, but he argues that it is possible to reconstruct the elements of a philosophical ethic by a careful analysis and re-interpretation of the philosophical principles embedded within Aquinas's moral theology. A Thomistic philosophical ethic must be able to stand on its own as a genuine ethic, and be open-ended enough to allow for a kind of completion in moral theology; the imperfect beatitude of philosophy must allow for a supernatural fulfillment in theology. Pace Sertillanges, however, Kluxen argues that the fit between Thomistic ethics and theology is not because of a common metaphysical basis. Kluxen argues that the genuinely practical character of Thomistic ethics requires that it cannot proceed on the basis of speculative metaphysical conclusions. Most importantly in our context, Kluxen argues that Thomistic ethics does not presuppose a highly developed concept of God as its ground. The practical quest for *eudaimonia* that is the central focus of the moral life must be broad enough to make sense of the moral lives of believers and unbelievers.

Among North American Thomists, perhaps the most vigorous proponent of a philosophical ethic has been Ralph McInerny.[17] McInerny has been concerned to prevent moral philosophy from being swallowed by moral theology, while at the same time insisting that Thomistic ethics is a genuine form of Christian ethics. McInerny argues for a heavily Aristotelian interpretation of Aquinas's moral thinking: "Thomas's moral theology begins more obviously under the guidance of Aristotle than under that of Sacred Scripture and the Christian tradition. . . .Thomas sees a continuing truth in Aristotelian ethics, one that has not been negated by Christian revelation."[18] The key point of convergence is Aquinas's adoption of Aristotelian *eudaimonia* as a this-worldly, imperfect beatitude that can serve as the focal point for moral action. On the basis of imperfect *eudaimonia* "it is possible to formulate true practical guidelines as to how in this life happiness can be achieved, and the truth of such precepts is independent of the truths that are to be had solely on the basis of divine faith."[19] McInerny argues that a Thomistic philosophical ethics is nevertheless "Christian" insofar as it consciously strives to articulate the *praeambula fidei*.[20] What this means is that philosophical ethics establishes moral truths which overlap with some revealed truths. The point of establishing such truths is not because revelation necessarily requires rational evidence, but rather in order to show the continuity or connection between the revealed and the rational, the supernatural and the natural. For example, as we shall explore in the third section, Aquinas believes that the precepts of the Decalogue are also contained in the natural law. While many accept the authority of the Decalogue on the basis of its origin in divine revelation, the Christian moral philosopher can show the harmony of revealed moral teaching with philosophical truths without reducing the

[17] See his *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, revised edition (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997) and *Aquinas on Human Action: A Theory of Practice* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

[18] Ibid. McInerny's remarks on the continuity between Aristotle and Aquinas are a reaction against the views of René Antoine Gauthier, who argued that Aquinas's theological perspective led him to alter Aristotle's ethics in significant ways. See McInerny's discussion in *Aquinas on Human Action*, 169-185. I think Gauthier is right.

[19] *The Question of Christian Ethics*, 38.

[20] See the discussion of this in Chapter Two, pp. 37–43.

former to the latter (since there is more to revealed morality than what can be known philosophically). Another aim of such Christian ethical philosophy is to defend revealed truth from philosophical criticism and open up the possibility of dialogue with non-believers. McInerny ultimately acknowledges, however, that to consider the task of Thomistic ethics as the establishment of *praeambula fidei* is to adopt an explicitly theological perspective[21]; as noted in Chapter Two, to consider philosophical truths with an eye towards their relationship to revealed truths as *praeambula fidei* is to be formally within the domain of theology. It is then to be wondered whether what is being called Christian philosophy is really philosophy at all.

Recently David Gallagher has offered a thoroughly theocentric reconstruction of Thomistic ethics.[22] In response to Kluxen's theistically thin version of Thomistic eudaimonism, Gallagher argues that Aquinas goes beyond Aristotle in assigning a central role to God in his ethics. Because man knows himself to be ordered to God as his ultimate end, and because this end is the starting point of all practical reasoning, "the rational creature's relationship to God and the duties attendant thereto lie at the heart of natural ethics."[23] Gallagher asserts that three doctrines display the centrality of God in Aquinas's ethics: the moral virtue of religion, the natural love for God, and natural law. Since the last will be discussed in the third section, the first two will be considered here. According to Gallagher, the centrality of the virtue of religion in Aquinas's ethics is usually overlooked because it is presumed to be a theological claim rather than a philosophical claim. The virtue of religion is a part of the cardinal virtue of justice because it involves the rendering by one person to another of a debt that is owed. In the case of religion, what is due God is honor in recognition of God's excellence as creator, ruler, and end of all that is. In recognition of God's primacy, the rational creature ought to honor God's superiority and seek God's assistance by acts of worship, devotion, and prayer. Religion is preeminent among all the moral virtues because it is more closely tied to the end of man than any other moral virtue. Gallagher argues that Aquinas thinks "religion is a natural virtue which can be recognized by reason independent of revelation and can be acquired and operative apart from the infusion of grace."[24] Corroboration for this intepretation of Aquinas appears to be offered in the following text on sacrifice:

> I respond that natural reason dictates to man that he be subject to some superior because of those defects that he recognizes in himself which necessitate that he be helped and guided by some superior. And whatever that superior be, it is called "God" by all people. Now just as in natural things inferiors are naturally subject to superiors, so too natural reason dictates to man according to a natural inclination that he exhibit subjection and honor in his own way to what exceeds him. It is fitting for man that he make use of sensible signs to express something

[21] *The Question of Christian Ethics*, 59.

[22] "The Role of God in the Philosophical Ethics of Thomas Aquinas," in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* V. 26: *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 1024-1033.

[23] Ibid., 1025.

[24] Ibid., 1027.

> since he receives knowledge from sensible things. And hence it follows from natural reason that man make use of sensible things by offering them to God as a sign of due subjection and honor in a way similar to subjects who offer something to their lords in recognition of dominion. This pertains to the nature of sacrifice and thus the offer of sacrifice pertains to the natural law.[25]

Thus the practice of the virtue of religion seems to be a dictate of natural law that holds for all people regardless of any differences in their notion of God. All people naturally seem to recognize that their debility puts them at the mercy of some higher power to which they are morally obliged to give due honor.

To honor God, however, is not the same as to love God and the latter, according to Gallagher, is more fundamental in a Thomistic philosophical ethic than the former. Whereas honor is the proper response to excellence, love is the proper response to goodness. Aquinas argues that it is natural for man to love God above all things on the basis of a more universal claim that it is natural for any part to love the good of the whole more than its own proper good.[26] God's goodness is the "whole" which man naturally loves, not because man is literally a "part" of God (pantheism), but rather because God is the infinite creative source of all the goodness that exists in a finite participatory manner in any creature. Insofar as God is the source, summit, and end of all goodness, it is natural for man to love God above all things. From this natural love is generated a moral imperative to order all else to God as the ultimate object of the will.[27]

Gallagher's explicitly theocentric approach to Thomistic ethics is not without its problems. First, it seems to make ethics depend rather heavily upon metaphysics in ways that imperil its universal and practical import. In other words, Gallagher's theocentric approach seems to rest upon speculative philosophical conclusions establishing God as origin, governor, and end of the universe. Yet, as Gallagher notes, Aquinas holds that such philosophical knowledge of God is had only by a few.[28] How then can such rare metaphysical knowledge serve as the basis for a practical universal ethic? Second, even if the requisite speculative awareness of God were widely available in some inchoate or intuitive form, it nevertheless remains a problem as to how an intellectual recognition that God ought to be the final end can become the basis for an individual's will act (intention) of God as his or her ultimate good. For Aquinas himself explicitly argues that as a result of the Fall, no human being can make God the ultimate good of his life and love God above all things except on the basis of the healing action of God's grace.[29] So Gallagher's claims about the natural moral obligation to order the self to God appear to conflict with Aquinas's assessment of the moral debility of fallen freedom.[30] Does this mean that there is an inherently tragic character to Thomistic ethics because it commands an end that lies beyond the human capacity to attain?

[25] ST II-II, 85, 1.

[26] ST I, 60, 5 and I-II, 109, 3.

[27] G. Stevens, "The Disinterested Love of God according to St. Thomas and some of his Modern Interpreters," *The Thomist* (1953): 307-333; 497-541.

[28] SCG I, 4.

[29] ST I-II, 109, 3.

[30] I argue this at greater length in "Aquinas on Pagan Virtue," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 553-557.

Or does it mean instead that there is something fatally and fundamentally flawed in the very project of an autonomous Thomistic ethic because it ignores the effects of the Fall on man's moral capacity, and because it sets up as an end an abstract philosophical God rather than the living God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

## II. THE CRITIQUE OF THOMISTIC EUDAIMONISM

Jacques Maritain articulated a powerful challenge to an autonomous Thomistic ethic based on imperfect or natural beatitude in the 1930's when he argued that such an ethic was inadequate on two grounds derived from Thomistic moral theology.[31] First, a purely philosophical approach ignores the actual condition of human nature as fallen. Fallen human beings are not capable of autonomously achieving the good commensurate with their nature as a result of moral debilitation. While a purely philosophical ethic can be theoretically correct about what would constitute natural human flourishing and prescribe right action for the sake of its achievement, nonetheless such knowledge would be useless to us in our fallen state. If the aim of a truly practical moral science is to enable the agent to become good by living well, then a purely philosophical moral science fails because it prescribes as an end for us (the natural love of God fructifying in philosophical contemplation) what we are incapable of achieving in our actual, fallen condition. Any practical science that ignores the actual moral condition of human nature in favor setting up an end answering to an abstract or "pure" nature is an illusory science. The second major deficiency of a pure moral science is that it fails to promote the true beatitude of human beings: supernatural union with the Triune God through the redeeming action of Jesus Christ. As Maritain puts it:

> If a man were to take such a purely philosophical moral science as a guide for life, he would surely be led astray. The *omissions* concerning man's relationship to the supernatural order which are to be found in this purely philosophical moral philosophy would falsify the direction of human life.[32]

A pure moral philosophy is thus essentially insufficient because it does not take into account the real and actual last end of human life. What would be the point of a moral science that does not lead us to our true end?

Maritain proposes to remedy the inherent inadequacies of a purely philosophical ethics by explicitly acknowledging that theological truths about man's nature and end must norm any adequate moral philosophy within the Christian tradition. Maritain attempts to formalize this subordination of moral philosophy to theology through the Aristotelian category of subalternation as developed by the great Thomistic commentator John of St. Thomas. In general, one science is subalternated to another science when its inquiry depends upon and presupposes as principles the conclusions that are generated by the subalternating science. The subalternated science does not have the resources within itself to know or prove the truth of the assumed principles. A standard example of subordination would be the way in which optics presupposes the conclusions of geometry. In a similar fashion

[31] *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936).
[32] Ibid., 164. Emphasis in original.

then, "moral philosophy adequately considered" (Maritain's term for his version of Thomistic ethics) presupposes as regulative certain truths about man's nature and destiny that it accepts from theology and cannot prove or even scientifically penetrate. Maritain tries to argue that this formal relationship of subalternation does not compromise the genuinely philosophical character of the moral science he is proposing. The reason for this is that while moral philosophy adequately considered presupposes the more ultimate context of human activity provided by theology, nonetheless it focuses its formal attention on human activity as directed towards its natural end. Moral philosophy adequately considered looks at human beings as ordered to life in the political community and conducts its inquiry according to strictly philosophical or scientific canons of inquiry. Within this restricted domain, moral philosophy is competent to deduce valid conclusions that do not formally presuppose revealed or faith-based premises.

Maritain's attempt to steer a middle course between "an over-simple academic Aristotelianism"[33] and the assimilation of ethics into moral theology met with widespread disagreement from the other Thomists of his day. The basic critique of Maritain by such contemporaries as Thomas Deman[34] and J. M. Ramirez[35] was that his proposal amounted to the assimilation of moral philosophy into moral theology. In effect, they accused Maritain of trying to have his cake and eat it too by invoking theological principles and then calling the resulting inquiry philosophy. Despite Maritain's elaborate attempts to claim that subalternation did not compromise the formally philosophical character of his moral science, it nonetheless appeared that moral philosophy adequately considered was really moral theology in disguise. Maritain's critics thought that he had given up the game in a way that would make it impossible for Thomists to enter into philosophical dialogue with non-Christians. Yet while Maritain's project did not win him many followers, he nevertheless had succeeded in raising a disturbing and potentially devastating challenge to any putatively pure philosophical ethics that sought to pass itself off as authentically Thomistic. Even if Maritain had been unable to formulate an adequate response to his own challenge, he had put his finger on a central tension within Thomism: What is the validity of an ethics based on a this-worldly imperfect beatitude when that beatitude is neither man's true ultimate end nor even attainable by human action?

One of the underlying and unquestioned assumptions of the discussion thus far, present alike in Maritain and the proponents of traditional Thomistic eudaimonism, is that Aquinas endorses the idea of a this-worldly imperfect beatitude as a fulfillment of the natural capacities of human beings. Allegedly there is a twofold human good or beatitude, one natural and the other supernatural, allowing for an ethics based on the former and a moral theology based on the latter. Recently, however, Denis Bradley has called this assumption into question and so offered a radical critique of the very possibility of a Thomistic eudaimonsm based on a

[33] Ibid., viii.

[34] "Sur l'organization du savior morale," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 23 (1934): 258-280, and "Questions disputées de science morale," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 28 (1937): 278-306.

[35] "Sur l'organisation du savior morale," *Bulletin Thomiste* (1935): 424-432 and "De Philosophia Morali Christiana," *Divus Thomas* (Fribourg) 14 (1936): 87-122; 181-204.

natural end of man in his *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*.[36] Bradley's book is a rejection of "the conceptual possibility and coherence of an autonomous or, equivalently, systematic Thomistic moral philosophy."[37] The nerve of Bradley's argument is that Aquinas recognizes only one true *telos* for human nature – the beatific vision – and that this claim rests on a genuinely philosophical argument. In other words, Bradley interprets Aquinas as arguing on philosophical grounds that human nature can only be completed in the vision of the divine essence.[38] If this is true, then there is no other end of human nature that can serve as the basis for a genuinely Thomistic ethic. Indeed, as we shall see, if the beatific vision is the single end of human nature, then there really cannot be any Thomistic ethic at all, since human reason is inadequate to direct us to our end.

Bradley's interpretation must deal with the prima facie problem of the numerous texts where Aquinas endorses the idea that there is a twofold human good, natural and supernatural, and so a corresponding twofold beatitude. Bradley's basic strategy is to argue that the doctrine of the twofold good does not mean that there is a twofold end. There is only one end of human nature: the beatific vision. Aquinas recognizes that there is a this-wordly moral perfection or beatitude associated with political virtue that is attainable by human action. This moral achievement does not complete a person, however, since it does not fulfill the capacities of the intellect. In formulating a doctrine of imperfect beatitude (something of an oxymoron), what Aquinas primarily wants to account for is the doctrine of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In characterizing Aristotle's *eudaimonia* as imperfect beatitude, Aquinas is evaluating it in within a theological context that is completely foreign to Aristotle. For Aristotle, the only way in which *eudaimonia* is imperfect is when it is measured against divine happiness; it is not imperfect as a human state compared to some putative other-worldly human condition. As contemporary Averroists argued against Aquinas, Aristotle's philosophical contemplation was perfect human happiness within Aristotle's own framework. To evaluate Aristotle's *eudaimonia* as "imperfect" is to invoke non-Aristotelian conceptions of both human nature and human destiny. It is crucial to Aquinas's argument, for example, that he establish the immortality of the human soul as well as its capacity for an intellectual vision of the divine essence, in order to substantiate his claim that no this-worldly mediated knowledge of the divine can count as genuine beatitude. Bradley's claims in this regard depend upon the seminal work in Thomistic anthropology of Anton Pegis, showing how Aquinas's view of human nature is non-Aristotelian, especially when it comes to the immortality of the soul and the natural endlessness of human nature.[39]

Bradley's central criticism of any attempt to articulate a Thomistic ethic based on imperfect beatitude is that it conflicts with Aquinas's philosophical argument

[36] (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

[37] Ibid., xi.

[38] This would be an example of Christian philosophy insofar as reason establishes on its own grounds a truth which it only came to recognize on the basis of faith. See the discussion of Christian philosophy in Chapter Two, pp. 40–43.

[39] In this context, see especially Pegis's response to Henri DeLubac in "Nature and Spirit: Some Reflections on the Problem of the End of Man," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 23 (1949): 62-79. A fuller discussions of Thomistic anthropology can be found in Chapter Seven.

that nothing short of the vision of the divine essence can perfect or beatify human nature. The *locus classicus* for this claim is *Summa theologiae* I-II, 3, 8. There Aquinas argues that the human intellect has a natural desire to know the very essence of the First Cause that would remain unsatisfied if human beings were able only to know that a First Cause exists but not what it is. The human intellect's natural desire to know the ultimate causal structure of reality would be frustrated if its inquiry were unable to penetrate to the essence of the ultimate cause. Hence human beatitude requires a vision of the divine essence. Anything less than an intellectual vision of the divine essence is not beatitude. According to these criteria, the kind of philosophical contemplation of God that is the summit of metaphysics, and that is identified by Aristotle as *eudaimonia*, is not genuine beatitude.

Yet a vision of the divine essence is not something that human beings can realize by autonomous action in this life; it can only be realized through the action of God elevating the human being to a share in God's own life in the beatific vision.[40] Hence the problem that has vexed interpreters of Aquinas throughout the history of Thomism: how can there be a genuinely natural desire, accessible to philosophical reflection, that can only be fulfilled by an end that is supernatural? Puzzling through this problem has been a favorite pastime of Thomists in every age, and in this century it became a subject of much debate as a result of Henri DeLubac's *Surnaturel: études historiques*.[41] Within this context, it is neither necessary nor possible to rehearse the theological debate about the relationship between nature and grace.[42] What matters here is to note the ethical import of the Thomistic doctrine of the natural desire of the intellect for the vision of God. If it is true that only the vision of God's essence can perfectly satisfy human nature, and that such a vision lies beyond our natural capacity and terrestrial existence, then no this-worldly state can be genuine beatitude. Even if a Thomistic philosopher must remain agnostic about whether and how such a vision is achieved, he must nonetheless remain committed to the claim that only such a vision could satisfy the human spirit and so reject any other claimant to completion.

What results from Bradley's analysis is the conclusion that a Thomist must deny the validity of any natural beatitude. There can be no natural eudaimonism. Moreoever, since any genuine but non-ultimate good cannot be rightly pursued outside of its ordering to the ultimate good, no ethics that does not take as its starting point man's supernatural beatitude can be legitimate from a Thomistic point of view. So Thomistic moral science ends up as a "philosophical paradox." A philosopher can show that human nature can only be satisfied by the vision of God, but he must be silent about whether and how that comes about because its realization is essentially supernatural. A philosopher can show that nothing created can complete human nature, that human nature has no natural end, but he cannot show how that *telos* is attained. Here we are far away from the Aristotelianism with which the ethical views of Aquinas are often identified, for there is no room for natural endlessness in Aristotelian nature. The Thomistic philosopher knows

[40] ST I, 12, 5.
[41] (Paris: J Aubier, 1946).
[42] See Chapter Seven.

that there is a deep and disturbing discrepancy between what human nature desires and what it can autonomously achieve. Rather than seeing this discrepancy as a tragic feature of human existence, however, he will see it instead as requiring the recognition of the openness to transcendence within human experience. Indeed a Thomistic philosopher will not be surprised to discover that it is impossible to be an Aristotelian-style eudaimonist because he will recognize that Aquinas's adherence to Aristotle is within the limits sets by his fidelity to Augustine, at the heart of whose *Confessiones* lies the realization: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[43]

## III. DIVINE LAW, NATURAL LAW, AND REVEALED MORALITY

Eudaimonism is not the only philosophical element within Aquinas's moral theology that could serve as the basis for a Thomistic ethic. Aquinas also employs natural law arguments that are subordinate and complementary to the overarching focus on beatitude. The same God who created human beings in the divine image as ordered to beatitude moves them toward that end by implanting within them the capacity to recognize beatitude as an imperative of their nature. In other words, natural law is the means whereby human being recognize their ordination towards beatitude by grasping intellectually that the good that is perfective of their nature ought to be pursued. According to many twentieth-century Thomists, especially in Anglo-American circles, natural law provides a more promising basis than eudaimonism on which to construct an autonomous Thomistic ethic. The major reason for this claim is that since natural law is based on natural inclinations and produces moral principles that are intrinsically practical in form, it avoids the philosophical problems engendered by the apparently speculative basis of eudaimonistic ethics. Since Thomistic eudaimonism seems to require a high degree of speculative philosophical groundwork regarding both the capacities of human nature and the existence of a First Cause/Final End, two problems arise. First, how plausible is it to make such rare and ramified knowledge the basis of a moral science that purports to have universal applicability? Does this not lead to a kind of eudaimonistic elitism, a beatitude for the few? And even for the elite few, would not such knowledge come too late in the moral day to be efficacious? The second major issue for eudaimonism is the notorious is-ought problem: how can speculative knowledge, either anthropological or metaphysical, become the motivating basis for practical moral prescriptions? For reasons such as these, along with the promise of dialogue with other forms of natural law theory, many Thomists have tried to construct an autonomous ethic based on natural law.

Within the context of the *Summa theologiae*, the treatment of natural law (I-II, 94) is set within a larger tract on law in general as an extrinsic principle whereby divine Wisdom instructs and guides human beings in their movement toward beatitude.[44] Law is essentially connected to a concept of God as lawgiver, who

[43] Bk I, c. 1.

[44] The complex functioning of law within Aquinas's moral theology cannot be discussed here. It is worth stressing again, however, that the entire discussion of law is explicitly theological because it culminates in the new law of grace: "[Aquinas] distinguishes five kinds of law: the eternal law, divine source of all legislation; the natural law, that is its direct participation in the human heart; and then the human law that is derived from the natural law. Revelation adds to this the Old Law, concentrated in the

guides human action through both natural law and revealed law. It is important to note that Aquinas emphasizes that divine law is primarily a work of reason rather than will. He defines law in general as "an ordinance of reason made by the person who has care of a community for the sake of the common good."[45] The ultimate law in the universe is the eternal law, which is the providential plan in God's mind whereby all creatures are ordered to their proper ends.[46] The natural law is derivative from the eternal law in that it denotes the special way in which rational creatures participate in divine providence or the eternal law. Aquinas explains:

> It is evident that all participate equally in the eternal law insofar as from its impression they have inclinations to their appropriate activities and ends. Among all, however, rational creatures are subject to divine providence in a more excellent way insofar as they participate in providence by providing for themselves and others. Hence through this they participate in the eternal law, from which they have a natural inclination to their due activity and end. And this participation in the eternal law by the rational creature is called the natural law.[47]

According to this schema, divine providence is the ultimate source of natural teleology, and teleological activity is the way in which creatures achieve the good commensurate with their natures envisioned by divine providence. What is distinctive of human teleological activity is that it is rational and self-determining. The natural law is the formal recognition through practical principles of the demands of the good answering to the human inclination to beatitude.

Aquinas's formal definition of natural law as a participation in eternal law does not mean, however, that practical knowledge of the precepts of the natural law presuppose the knowledge that God is their ultimate source. While any adequate philosophical or theological explanation of natural law will require an explicit adversion to the divine mind as source, a recognition of its practical force and content does not. What an account invoking divine providence does is provide a framework wherein adherence to the principles of the natural law can be understood as a sharing in God's creative purpose or providence; such recognition gives a new force and depth to the demands of the natural law. The human flourishing that is the end of the natural law is seen as a state that constitutes conformity to the divine plan; to live in accord with the natural law is not just to live according to nature, but also according to God's plan.

While there is general agreement among Thomists that God must figure into any adequate theoretical account of the origin of natural law, but that such knowledge is not required to account for its universal practical availability, there are

Decalogue, which rejoins the natural law; and the evangelical Law of the New Testament. These different laws are connected by a true dynamism that originates in the eternal law, descends through the natural law to civil law, and then returns towards God its summit in the evangelical law, which is the most perfect participation here below in the eternal law, and the closest approach to the ultimate end proposed to us." Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 181. I have modified the translation.

[45] ST I-II, 90, 4.

[46] See ST I-II, 91, 1 and 93, 1.

[47] ST I-II, 91, 2.

significant differences regarding how God figures into the actual content of the natural law. In the *locus classicus* for Aquinas's account of natural law, *Summa theologiae* I-II, 94, 2, he argues that the primary precept of the natural law is the imperative that the good is to be done and pursued while evil is to be avoided. He goes on to argue that reason naturally apprehends certains goods to be pursued on the basis of a natural inclination in every human being towards them. He identifies these goods as corresponding to inclinations at three different levels. First, we have a natural law obligation to do what is required to conserve our lives because we share with all substances a natural inclination to self-preservation. Second, we have a natural law obligation to pursue the goods related to family life (union of male and female in the care of offspring) as grounded in our nature as animals. Third, and most importantly, we have a natural law obligation to pursue the goods that are peculiar to beings with intelligence:

> In a third way, there is present in human beings an inclination to the good according to the nature of reason that is proper to man: for example, man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God and live in society. Accordingly, whatever is related to an inclination like this pertains to the natural law; namely, that man avoid ignorance, that he not offend those with whom he must live, and anything else like this.

The claim that God is the object of natural law obligation receives its stongest formulation when Aquinas discusses the relationship between natural law and revealed moral law. In discussing the precepts of the Old Law, Aquinas argues that their content is derivable from and congruent with the natural law, although not all with the same degree of perspicuity.[48] Aquinas goes on to say that the moral precepts of the Old Law are reducible to the Decalogue, and that these enunciate the moral truths that are the most knowable according to the natural law – they are described as being knowable from the primary principles of the natural law with but slight consideration.[49] The Decalogue itself, however, is reducible to two still more basic moral precepts commanding love of God and love of neighbor; the first three commandments are based upon the first, while the last seven are based upon the second.[50] Aquinas describes these two basic precepts as "the first general principles of the natural law which are known immediately either through natural reason or through faith; hence all the precepts of the Decalogue are related to the two basic precepts as conclusions to general principles."[51] Aquinas describes the command to love God as among the most certain and best known precepts of the natural law: "for some moral precepts are most certain and hence it is clear that they do not need to be promulgated, such as the command to love God and neighbor and others of this kind which are like the ends of the moral precepts, and in these no one can err according to the judgment of reason."[52] From passages such as these it seems clear that Aquinas thinks that the primary obligation of the natural

[48] ST I-II, 100, 3.
[49] ST I-II, 100, 3.
[50] ST I-II, 100, 5.
[51] ST I-II, 100, 3 ad1.
[52] ST I-II, 100, 11.

law is to love God. Hence all other natural law obligations would seem to be subordinate to the primary imperative to love God. Thus whether one begins with beatitude or natural inclination, God is the ultimate good to which all other goods must be ordered.

The convergence in content of the precepts of the natural law with the divinely revealed moral law is to be expected because both originate in God. The very same God who created human nature and gave it the innate capacity to recognize that certain goods ought to be pursued in order to fulfill that nature also revealed moral precepts to that same end. The natural law and the revealed moral law have the same content but different modes of promulgation: the natural law is made known through the light of natural reason, while the Decalogue is made known through revelation. The natural law does not derive its prescriptive force on the basis of being divinely commanded, but rather on the basis of being grasped by reason. The natural law and the revealed law are both rooted in the divine will, since both pertain to divine providence, but the former does not necessarily presuppose an explicit recognition of its ultimate grounding in the divine will. This means that Aquinas is not a proponent of a divine command theory of ethics because he does not make the goodness or badness of an action consist in its conformity to a divine command, but rather in its conformity to reason.

The overlap between the natural law and the revealed moral law raises an obvious question: why would God promulgate through revelation what he had created us to know immediately through the light of natural reason? If the first principles of the natural law are truly self-evident, why do they need to be revealed? Aquinas replies to an objection along these lines by noting that just as it is fitting for God to make knowable through revelation certain speculative truths that are in principle available to natural reason (the *praeambula fidei*) because human reason easily falls into error in such matters, so too it is fitting for God to reveal moral imperatives that can in principle be known by natural reason because they too are often subject to human error. The explanation for error in the case of moral imperatives is sin:

> Regarding moral precepts, human reason cannot err concerning the most general precepts of the natural law when it comes to their universal import, but because of the habit of sin it can be obscured when it comes to what is to be done in particular cases. With respect to other moral precepts, which are like conclusions deduced from the common principles of the natural law, the reason of many goes astray such that they judge things that are intrinsically evil to be licit. Hence it was necessary that both kinds of errors be remedied by the authority of divine law.[53]

God reveals the moral law as a remedy for the way in which sin impairs our capacity for moral judgment. In commenting on the question whether the natural law is the same for all people, Aquinas argues in the affirmative but notes that knowledge of the natural law can be impaired by passion and bad habits.[54] So even

[53] ST I-II, 99, 2 ad 2.
[54] ST I-II, 95, 4.

though every human being has the capacity to formulate the basic precepts of the natural law, not all develop that capacity properly because of bad moral training and sin. Hence the need for a revealed moral law.

Yet even when the influence of sin is factored in as an explanation for why natural law precepts are not more evidently known, it still seems hard to reconcile what Aquinas says about the primacy of the natural law obligation to love God with his own claims (confirmed by empirical evidence) about how difficult and rare the natural knowledge of God is. When discussing a priori approaches to establishing the existence of God, Aquinas argues that the existence of God is not immediately self-evident to the human mind.[55] So how then can there be an immediate self-evident natural law obligation to know and love God? Aquinas's response is:

> It should be said that although God is the ultimate end attained and first in intention in the natural appetite, nevertheless it is not necessary that God be first known in the human mind that is ordered to the end, but rather in the mind of the one ordering, which is the case in other things that tend to their ends by natural appetite. God is known and intended in a certain general way, however, insofar as the mind desires to be and to live well, which it will do only when it has God.[56]

Hence all moral striving toward the good is a kind of implicit and confused striving after God. The natural desire for human flourishing is a covert desire for God.

The place of God in natural law ethics has been much debated by contemporary Thomists. For those desirous of pursuing a dialogue with non-Thomistic and more analytic accounts of natural law, Aquinas's remarks about God and the natural law are problematic for a number of reasons. First, they seem too theistically question-begging to be appropriate for ethical argumentation with non-believers. It has been traditional for Roman Catholics in general and Thomists in particular to employ natural law argumentation in the public arena as a way of promoting moral positions that are purported to be based on rational argumentation that is accessible to all interlocutors without any logical connection with divine revelation. Hence it seems advisable to employ a form of natural law reasoning that is as theistically thin as possible in order to preclude the suspicion that it is just a disguised form of revealed morality. Second, the legacy of the is-ought problem means that practical natural law precepts must be presented as valid without depending on speculative claims about God or human nature. Third, a theocentric ethic wherein the pursuit of God is the ultimate good seems incompatible with modern liberal theories of natural law which presume thin theories of the human good that leave individuals with significant freedom to fashion their own conception of the good life. In the light of modern natural law theories, Aquinas's account of the moral good seems too thick because too theocentric.

The most well-known and debated interpretation of Aquinas's natural law theory is the one associated with Germain Grisez and John Finnis. Since Finnis has

[55] ST I, 2, 2
[56] DT 1, 3 ad 4.

had more influence in philosophical circles and claims a closer kinship to Aquinas, his revision of Aquinas's natural law theory will be examined here.[57] In Finnis's seminal *Natural Law and Natural Rights*,[58] he presents Aquinas's natural law theory as based on underived first practical principles specifying the basic human goods to be pursued as logically independent of any speculative claims about human nature or teleology: "Aquinas considers that practical reasoning begins not by understanding this nature from the outside, as it were, by way of psychological, anthropological or metaphysical observations and judgments defining human nature, but by experiencing one's nature, so to speak, from the inside, in the form of one's inclinations."[59] There is no move from an anthropological "is" to a moral "ought" in Aquinas. When it comes to God, Finnis wants to argue that natural law is likewise not dependent of any claims of natural theology for its practical viability: "Aquinas, for example, considers that the first principles of the natural law are self-evident, but that (i) the existence of God is *not* self-evident to the human mind, (ii) a knowledge that friendship with God is our last end is *not* available by 'natural' reasoning but only by revelation, (iii) attainment of that end is not possible by natural means but only by supernatural grace; and (iv) the will of God, so far as it concerns creatures (such as mankind), cannot be discovered by natural reasoning."[60] Finnis notes that while it is not necessary to appeal to God in order to explain how the natural law is practically efficacious, nonetheless God is central to a high-level theoretical account of its ultimate origin.

In place of the theocentric teleology of traditional Thomistic accounts of natural law, Finnis argues that the first principles of practical reason indicate that a number of irreducibly diverse and incommensurable goods constitute integral human fulfillment: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, friendship, practical reasonableness, and religion. According to Finnis, these goods are all equally basic insofar as they are all self-evidently good, irreducible to any other, non-instrumental, and equal candidates to be regarded as the most important good. In this schema there is no objective hierarchy of goods that would justify some kind of normative dominant-end eudaimonism of the kind attributed to Aquinas in most interpretations. Because there is no objective hierarchy, an individual's choice to pursue integral human fulfillment with a special focus on one good as most important will be based on subjective factors: "But one's reasons for choosing the particular ranking that one does choose are reasons that properly relate to one's temperament, upbringing, capacities, and opportunities, not to differences of rank of intrinsic value between the basic values."[61] An individual is required to pursue the basic goods in accord with the demands of practical reasonableness, but reason cannot provide any ranking. Within this moral framework, the basic good of religion, which Finnis characterizes quite broadly as a concern with a possible

[57] Grisez's major focus has been on systematic moral theology in *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, 3 vol. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983, 1993, 1997).

[58] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[59] Ibid., 34.

[60] Ibid., 48-9.

[61] Ibid., 94.

transcendent order of the cosmos,[62] has no claim to be more basic than any other human good.

It must be noted that Finnis makes no claim in *Natural Law and Natural Rights* that he is proposing a specifically Thomistic version of natural law; it is instead an exercize in "analytical jurisprudence" involving a contemporary re-interpretation of the classical natural law tradition with a special emphasis on Aquinas because of his "strategic" position.[63] However in his most recent work, *Aquinas. Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*,[64] Finnis observes: "For the past thirty years or so, my work in moral, political, and legal theory has employed principles which seem to me to be substantially those employed by Aquinas in his main writings on practical reason, natural law, *prudentia*, and justice."[65] What emerges from the foundational account of Aquinas offered in this latest book is that Finnis thinks Aquinas's view of natural law is substantially in accord with the view defended in *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. Finnis argues that Aquinas did not have a dominant end teleology and recognized instead a number of irreducible basic goods. According to Finnis, Aquinas's conception of *beatitudo* ends up to be "not so much an item to be added to the basic list of human goods, as rather a kind of synthesis of them: satisfaction of all intelligent desires and participation in all the basic human goods (whatever they are), and thus a fulfillment which is complete and integral (integrating all its elements and participants)."[66] Since no state of affairs in this world can constitute complete integral fufillment, what we strive for is imperfect beatitude in accord with the demands of practical reasonableness. Finnis notes the texts where Aquinas seems to make philosophical contemplation of the divine the normative and dominant constituent of beatitude, but he downplays their significance by claiming that they reflect the unresolved tensions within the Aristotelian tradition between dominant and inclusive conceptions of *eudaimonia*. According to Finnis, only the life of practical reasonableness and moral virtue, not contemplation, can serve as the basis for a social and political theory. In general, Finnis tends to treat Aquinas's more explicit claims about contemplation of the divine as the end of life as either (1) reducible to the more basic good of knowledge in general or (2) as pertaining to theology.

Finnis's natural law theory has been a lightning rod for Thomistic critique. A recent entry in the debate, *Aquinas's Theory of Natural Law. An Analytic Reconstruction* by Anthony J. Lisska, provides a useful overview of the literature.[67] While Lisska takes issue with Finnis on some key points, he shares with Finnis the desire to make Aquinas's doctrine palatable to an analytic audience by detaching it from its theistic presuppositions. Lisska's basic strategy is to argue that the key to an analytic reconstruction of Aquinas's natural law theory is a defense of natural kinds with dispositional properties, and that this can be accomplished independently of any appeal to God.[68] Other Thomists, however, have been highly

[62] Ibid., 89-90.
[63] See the "Preface," vi-vii.
[64] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[65] Ibid., viii.
[66] Ibid., 85-86.
[67] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[68] Ibid., 116-138.

critical of the way that Finnis downplays the role of God in Aquinas's natural law theory. Russell Hittinger's *A Critique of the New Natural Law Theory*[69], for example, focuses its critique of both Grisez and Finnis (but especially the former) on the role of religion and God. Hittinger argues for a natural law theory that presupposes conclusions about human teleology and God leading to a prominent role for the virtue of religion within natural law ethics.

On another front, Benedict Ashley has criticized Finnis and Grisez for imputing a theory of multiple teleology (polyteleology) to Aquinas.[70] Ashley interprets their move away from a dominant-end beatitude in divine contemplation, and towards a view of integral human fulfillment through the pursuit of all the basic goods, as motivated by a concern to fashion a moral ideal that is more readily accessible because it does not privilege a rare human achievement or implicitly denigrate what can practically be realized by most moral agents. Ashley argues that Aquinas's authentic view, wherein contemplation of the divine is the ultimate good to which all other goods are ordered, provides a unity to the moral life that is lacking in the Finnis-Grisez position and gives a non-instrumental value for all genuine human goods. Ashley's argument that Aquinas held for a genuine natural telos for human action conflicts, however, with the interpretation of Bradley offered in the previous section.

The best way to conclude is to consider the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, the most prominent moral philosopher currently writing in the Thomistic tradition, whose work touches on all the major questions considered in this chapter. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, the work where MacIntyre first espouses a Thomistic viewpoint, he explicitly distances himself from Finnis's reading of Aquinas because he thinks that Aquinas's account of natural law is strongly theocentric: "It is then important to my interpretation of Aquinas's positions that I understand his positions on practical knowledge and practical reasoning, let alone those of justice, as always presupposing the type of rational knowledge of God exemplified in the conclusions of the *Prima Pars*."[71] The reference to the earlier discussions in the *Summa theologiae* reveals a central premise of MacIntyre's critique of other Thomists: "the *Summa* can only be read as a whole and can only be evaluated as a whole."[72] This means that Aquinas's natural law treatise presupposes the previously established conclusions regarding the existence of God and the goodness of God. MacIntyre notes this is a feature of "crucial importance":

> Modern Catholic protagonists of theories of natural law have sometimes claimed that we can fully understand and obey the natural law without any knowledge of God. But according to Aquinas all the moral precepts of the Old Law, the Mosaic Law summed up in the Ten Commandments, belong to the natural law, including those which command us as to how we are to regard God and comport ourselves in relation to Him. A knowledge of God is, on Aquinas's

[69] (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

[70] "What is the End of the Human Person? The Vision of God and Integral Human Fulfillment," in *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition*, ed. Luke Gormally (London: Four Courts Press, 1994), 68-96.

[71] *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 188.

[72] *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Geneology, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 135.

> view, available to us from the outset of our moral enquiry and plays a crucial part in our progress in that enquiry. And it would be very surprising if this were not so: the unifying framework within which our understanding of ourselves, of each other, and of our shared environment progresses is one in which that understanding, by tracing the sequences of final, formal, efficient, and material causality, always refers us back to a unified first cause from which flows all that is good and all that is true in what we encounter.[73]

It is in the treatise on God as the ultimate end or final cause of human life that Aquinas effects his most original appropriation and transformation of the divergent strains of Aristotelianism and Pauline-Augustinianism. As MacIntyre notes, the progression of the discussion of the ultimate good in *Summa theologiae* I-II, 1-5 proceeds largely along Aristotelian lines, but then "Aquinas turns the criteria for an ultimate good to which Aristotle had appealed against Aristotle and uses them to show, first that the ultimate good must lie in the relationship of the soul to something outside itself and, secondly, that in no state available in this created world can the type of good in question be found."[74] MacIntyre describes this as invoking Aristotle against Aristotle "in the interests of Scripture and Augustine, not because he [Aquinas] was rejecting Aristotelianism, but because he was trying to be a better Aristotelian than Aristotle."[75] What results, however, is a kind of tragic Aristotelianism because it leads to the discovery that human nature has a *telos* (the beatific vision) that lies beyond its natural powers of comprehension and achievement. We know that we can only be satisfied by a Good that we cannot naturally comprehend and that we cannot naturally attain. On purely rational grounds, what would result is a kind of Hobbesian conclusion that since there is no attainable ultimate good, there is only the successive pursuit of unsatisfying objects "that ceaseth only in Death."

In addition to our inability to know and achieve our ultimate end, there is another non-Aristotelian disruption in our moral lives: the tendancy to sin as a result of the Fall. Here is where the Pauline-Augustinian background to Aquinas comes in. MacIntyre writes:

> What one discovers in oneself and in all other human beings is something surd and unaccountable in terms of the rational understanding of human nature: a rooted tendency to disobedience in the will and distraction by passion, which causes obscuring of the reason and on occasion systematic cultural deformation. . . . What the discovery of wilful evil disrupts, or apparently disrupts, is the itelligible scheme through which the individual is able to understand himself or herself as both directed towards and explicable in terms that [ultimate] end. . . . the discovery of human inability and resourcelessness to live by the natural law and to achieve the excellences of the virtues, the discovery of sin, points

[73] Ibid., 141.
[74] Ibid., 137.
[75] Ibid.

> forward to a kind of existential despair which was completely unknown in the ancient world but which has been a recurrent malady of modernity.[76]

Because of our tendency to sin, we are unable to achieve even the moral good proportionate to our nature and recognizable by the natural law. This tendency to sin is a form of disobedience insofar as the natural law is understood to be rooted in God and revealed in the Decalogue. It is "a disobedience ineradicable by even the best moral education in accordance with reason."[77] This is not Arisotelian *akrasia*, presumably overcomable by moral striving, but Augustinian *mala voluntas*.

MacIntyre's account of our moral condition appears tragic and despairing. Yet the discovery of wilful evil, on top of an unattainable end, is paradoxically the very condition for our achievement of that end because: "The acknowledgment by oneself of radical defect is a necessary condition for one's reception of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity."[78] The treatise on natural law and the Decalogue is immediately followed by the treatise on grace in the *Summa* because grace is the means whereby we achieve the good prescribed by law. It is only by grace's healing of the will that we can consistently choose the good in this life. We need the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love if we are to order our lives to God. MacIntyre argues that it is only with the help of grace that human beings can achieve genuine virtue: "It is only the kind of knowledge which faith provides, the kind of expectation which hope provides, and the capacity for friendship with other human beings and with God which is the outcome of charity which can provide the other virtues with what they need to become genuine excellences, informing a way of life in and through which the good and the best can be achieved."[79] It is only as theological or infused virtues that prudence, justice, temperance, and courage become fully operative and unified. And while such virtues are ultimately a function of divine grace, they are mediated to individuals through moral tutelage in a faith community with authoritative rules of practice.

MacIntyre's moral theory is by far the most theocentric offered by any prominent Thomist. It has predictably generated criticism from philosophers in the academy as fideistic and ideological.[80] And, perhaps just as predictably, it has generated criticism from Thomists.[81] While there is much that separates the non-Thomistic and Thomistic critics of MacIntyre, what they have in common is the worry that MacIntyre's account of Aquinas is no longer truly philosophical because it relies on premises that are explicitly theological. MacIntyre would reply,

[76] Ibid., 140.

[77] *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 181.

[78] *Three Rival Versions*, 140.

[79] Ibid.

[80] See the reviews of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* by Thomas Nagel, "MacIntyre Versus the Enlightenment," in *Other Minds: Critical Essays 1969-1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 203-209 and by Martha Nussbaum, "Recoiling from Reason," *New York Review of Books* 36, n. 19 (December 7, 1989), 36-41.

[81] For example, I argue that MacIntyre is too pessimistic about human nature and the possibility of virtue in my "Pagan Virtue." Robert George has argued that MacIntyre's account of natural law is too relativistic in "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," *Review of Metaphysics* 42 (1989): 593-605.

however, that it is impossible to do justice to Aquinas's account of the moral life without bringing in theological premises. He is surely right about this, since, as noted at the outset, Aquinas is primarily a theologian and his account of morality is explicitly and exclusively theological. One cannot be true to Aquinas's original thought without doing moral theology. MacIntyre thus belongs with Maritain and Bradley as Thomists who would deny the possibility of a non-theological Thomistic ethic, although it is a weakness of his account that he does not systematically reflect on the problem of the relationship between philosophy and theology. As other Thomists have feared, and the reviews by Nagel and Nussbaum confirm, to be completely faithful to Aquinas the moral theologian appears to ruin the prospect of engaging non-Christians in ethical dialogue. Yet MacIntyre would argue that this is not the case. When Thomists encounter ethical competitors with incommensurable viewpoints, they can argue for the rational superiority of Thomism as a tradition by showing that it is more coherent, more comprehensive, and more resourceful in dealing with the moral facts than its competitors. It can show itself to be especially resourceful in the following way:

> For among those resources, so it is claimed, is an ability not only to identify as limitations, defects, and errors of the opposing view what are or ought to be taken to be limitations, defects, and errors in the light of the standards of the opposing view itself, but also to explain in precise and detailed terms what it is about the opposing view which engenders just these particular limitations, defects, and errors and also what it is about that view which must deprive it of the resources required for understanding, overcoming, and correcting them. And at the same time it will be claimed that what is cogent, insightful, and true in that opposing view can be incorporated within one's own view, providing on occasion needed corrections of that view.[82]

MacIntyre also thinks that Thomism can supply a cogent theoretical explanation for ideological blindness, which occurs when the opposition is not merely attributable to the peculiar qualities of an individual mind but rather results from a systemic intellectual-social distortion. Thomism can provide a geneology of geneology in terms of its understanding of Original Sin: it is *mala voluntas* that is the ultimate cause of intellectual blindness.[83] So what MacIntyre's brand of Thomistic moral theory ultimately requires of an adherent of another tradition would seem to be not so much intellectual persuasion as moral-religious conversion. Thus arises an apparent dilemma for Thomistic moral theory with respect to its posture towards non-adherents: If it is to remain true to its theological roots, it has to give up the pretension to being a philosophical ethic and ultimately aim at conversion. If it wants to fashion a philosophical ethic, it has to alter some crucial features of Aquinas's original account in order to be rationally persuasive to non-believers. Perhaps the way out of the dilemma is to see the second as the means to the first as a kind of *praeparatio evangelica*. In any case, the relationship between morality and religion remains a deep problem within Thomism.

[82] *Three Rival Versions*, 146.
[83] Ibid., 147.

# 7. Human Nature and Destiny

According to the Aristotelian canons of definition to which Aquinas subscribed, a complete definition of something necessarily involves an articulation of its final cause. The final cause of a being is its end or *telos* in the sense of what it would be if it were to become fully realized, perfected, or completed according to its kind or nature. Understood as such, the final cause of a being is essentially connected to its formal cause because it expresses what it would mean for the form to realize its capacity for development into a perfected instance of its kind. In the light of this logic, it can be easily seen why the question of human nature is inextricably connected to the question of human destiny: it is impossible to understand what human nature is without knowing what it it is meant to become when fully realized. And since Aquinas's overarching perspective is explicitly theocentric and theological, this means that considerations of human nature and human destiny must be set within the context of creation. In this light, what human nature is can only be understood in the light of what God the Creator intends as its end.

Aquinas discusses the end of human nature in the context of the biblical doctrine of the human person as created in the image of God (*imago dei*). The end or purpose of God's creation of human beings is so that they can image God by sharing in God's own self-knowledge and self-love. In the context of answering the question of whether the image of God is found in every person, Aquinas explains:

> I respond that since man is said to be in the image of God because of his intellectual nature, he is said to be most in the image of God when his intellect can most completely imitate God. But man's intellectual nature imitates God maximally when it knows and loves God himself. Hence the image of God can be considered in man in three ways: The first is insofar as man has a natural aptitude to know and love God, which consists in the very nature of mind that is common to all people. The second way is insofar as a man actually or habitually knows and loves God, even though imperfectly; this is the image by the

> conformity of grace. The third way is insofar as man actually knows and loves God perfectly and this is the image by likeness of glory.[1]

In Aquinas's understanding of *imago dei*, creation is linked to the beatific vision: we have been created precisely so that we might share in the beatific vision as our end. God's intention in creating us as modeled after his own being (exemplar causality) is so that we might find completion (final causality) through actually sharing in God's own life in the glory of the beatific vision. In this way, human destiny explains human origin and human nature. The doctrine of the human person as *imago dei* is dynamic: we are created with a natural aptitude to know and love God, which is begun but imperfectly realized in this life by that gratuitous sharing in God's own life that is called grace and ultimately brought to perfection in the beatific vision in heaven. Aquinas's own shorthand way of designating the openness to God that is inscribed in human nature is *capax dei*. We are capable of taking on a share in the divine life because we have been made in the image of God.

While a complete *theological* anthropology would discuss the human person as *imago dei* in all three stages of realization – nature, grace, and glory – the concerns of this volume dictate a focus on the first. It must be noted, however, that the relationship between the three domains was the central problematic in Roman Catholic theology at the middle of the twentieth century and that all the contending parties in the debate sought support for their own views in the texts of Aquinas.[2] Thus while the focus in this chapter is on the nature side of the nature-grace or natural-supernatural debate, this larger background must be acknowledged in order to understand much of the Thomistic literature on the question of human nature and destiny. The focus here will be on a consideration of the human person as created with a dynamic openness to God through its intellectual and spiritual capacities. In the Thomistic context, however, the human person is not a pure intellect, but rather an embodied intellect, a soul in a body, a spirit in the world (*Geist im Welt*). So the central question emerges as to how an embodied and finite intellect can be *capax dei*. Or, to put the matter in another idiom, what are the *a priori* conditions of the very possibility that we are *capax dei*?

The varying formulations in the preceding paragraph are meant to indicate that Thomistic anthropology has been carried out in two distinct conceptual universes. The first and more traditional approach hews closely to Aquinas's original and broadly Aristotelian intellectual universe of discourse about the human person. An outline of such an approach, centering on portraying the human person as a soul-body unity that is open to the divine by having a natural desire for God, will be the focus of the first part of this chapter. An alternative approach, associated with the movement known as Transcendental Thomism,[3] involves a re-thinking of Aquinas's basic anthropology in dialogue with transcendental philosophy. The

[1] ST I, 93, 4. On the doctrine of *imago dei* in Aquinas, a magisterial overview with good bibliographical references can be found in Jean Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, 1996), 105-132.

[2] An overview of this debate can be found in Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

[3] See the overview in the first chapter, pp. 13–16.

second part of the chapter will be devoted to outlining this approach by a consideration of the work of Karl Rahner, the most influential of all Transcendental Thomists.[4]

## I. TRADITIONAL THOMISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

As noted earlier, the traditional Thomistic approach to anthropology is articulated according to Aristotelian categories (e.g. the soul-body relationship as a form-matter relationship). Yet it would be a mistake to infer that because Aquinas uses Aristotelian categories he thereby adopts Aristotle's anthropology. To begin with, Aristotle's account of the human soul in his *De anima* is notoriously cryptic and in Aquinas's own day there were widely divergent and competing interpretations of its doctrine. More importantly, however, Aquinas's appropriation of elements of the *De anima* is at the service of a fundamentally religious view of the human person that results in an anthropology that is decidedly un-Aristotelian in some respects. Two concerns of Aquinas mark the distance from Aristotle. The first is the aim to give an explicit account of the hylomorphic unity (form-matter) of the human being as a body-soul composite (something that Aristotle did not do) within the context of the metaphysics of creation. Aquinas offers a metaphysical view of the human person wherein such Aristotelian concepts as form and matter, soul and body, act and potency, etc. are incorporated into his metaphysics of created being as composed of *esse* (to-be) and essence. The second major un-Aristotelian concern of Aquinas is to portray the human person as a spiritual being having a dynamic orientation to the beatific vision as a completion realized after death and so requiring some account of human immortality. Prior to Aquinas, it was widely assumed that the Christian view of the human person could only be safeguarded through some form of modified Platonism that guarantees the spirituality and immortality of the soul by conceiving it as a substance separate from the body. Aquinas's great achievement was to show how a view of the human person as a soul-body unity was compatible with the religious view of the person as ordered to eternal life with God. Ultimately, as Anton Pegis has argued, the Thomistic notion of man owes its inspiration more to Augustine than to Aristotle.[5] That Aquinas could incoporate Aristotelian philosophical elements into a broadly Augustinian religious view of the human person within his own distinct metaphysics is the genius of his achievement.

### *A. The Human Person as a Soul-Body Unity*

According to Aristotelian hylomorphic theory, form and matter are related to each other in the following way. The substantial form is the fundamental ontological principle that makes the being be what it is; it determines its natural kind, its capacities for action, its intelligibility, and its unity as a being. Matter is the potential substratum or stuff that is actualized by form; it explains why a being is subject to change and why it is this individual being. Matter is considered a purely potential principle; all of the being's actuality and determination is a

[4] Another development worthy of note in Thomistic anthropology is the dynamic and relational metaphysics of the person articulated by W. Norris Clarke in *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993).

[5] *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963).

function of form. Because of this, the proper correlate to substantial form is designated as prime matter, the ultimate potential substratum that underlies all change. As pure potentiality, prime matter cannot have any kind of real existence independent of form; it can only exist as determined by some form. In the material world, substantial form and prime matter exist together. Material forms can only exist in matter and matter can only exist as informed matter.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas attempts to explain the relationship of soul to body in terms of hylomorphism. Soul is a peculiar kind of substantial form insofar as it is what underlies the being of living things and so is correlated with organic body. Aquinas recognizes three distinct grades of soul: vegetative, animal, and rational. The soul is what makes a living being be the kind of being that it is; it is what explains its peculiar capacities, activities, and dispositions; it is what gives intelligibility; it explains why the matter is configured as a peculiar type of body; it explains the unity of the being; and, as we shall discuss later, it is the explanation for the end or *telos* of the being. It is important to note that because soul is the substantial form of a living being, the matter that is its correlate is prime matter, not body. Even though Aquinas accepts the reigning language of dualism and talks about the relationship of the soul to the body, strictly speaking the two are not correlatives because bodiliness is something that belongs to matter precisely because of soul as substantial form; there can be no body independent of soul as substantial form because the latter is the cause of the former. This means that human corporality is caused by the soul.[6] The soul is the causal explanation for why the matter that we have is organized into the kind of body that we have. Indeed the body that we have is such as it is precisely for the sake of the soul, so that the soul can achieve its end through its proper activity. We have the kind of body that we have precisely because of the nature of our intellects:

> It must be said that since form is not for the sake of the matter, but rather matter is for the sake of form, it is from the form that we must seek the reason why the matter is such as it is rather than vice-versa. As noted earlier [55, 2], the human intellect occupies the lowest rank of intellectual substances in the order of nature insofar as it does not have an innate knowledge of truth like angels, but rather must gather divisible things through the senses, as Dionysius says in Chapter Seven of *On Divine Names*. Now no nature can lack what is necessary to it as such a nature. Hence it was necessary that the intellectual soul not only have the power of knowing, but also the power of sensing. But there cannot be sensation without a bodily organ. Hence it was necessary that the intellective soul be united to such a body because it has suitable sense organs.[7]

As the reference to angelic knowledge indicates, and as dualistic theories make plain, how one relates the soul to the body is essentially connected with one's theory of the origin of knowledge. According to Aquinas, dualism is connected with epistemological claims that knowledge is essentially independent of sensation.

[6] See Bernardo C. Bazan, "La coporalité selon saint Thomas," *La revue philosophique de Louvain* 81 (1983): 369-409.

[7] ST I, 76, 5.

According to Aquinas's theory of human knowledge, however, it is essentially connected to sensation. Hence the soul is united to a body precisely for the sake of its distinctive intellectual activity: knowing the essences of material things on the basis of abstraction from sense images or phantasms. The human soul is created to be embodied because it is the kind of intellect that operates in dependence upon sense images for its access to the real. The human body is thus not a hindrance to the soul's intellectual activity, but rather is its perfect instrument precisely as structured by and rooted in the human soul as its formal cause.

Aquinas adamantly rejects the dualistic view that the soul is a complete substance in its own right and indeed the very essence of being human.[8] The soul is rather a part, albeit the most important part, of the soul-body composite that is the human person: "since the soul is a part of human nature, it does not belong to a genus or species in its own right nor is it a person or hypostasis; it is rather the composite [that is a person]."[9] Person, the technical term designating an individual substance of a rational nature, is reserved in human beings for the soul-body composite. As we shall see shortly, from this claim it follows that the immortality of the soul does not guarantee the immortality of the person. Whether embodied or disembodied, the soul is not a human person. The acts of the human person, even thinking, are the actions of the composite subject: "We can say that the soul understands like we say that the eye sees, but it is more proper to say that the man knows through the soul."[10]

The advantage of Aquinas's strategy of uniting the soul to the body as substantial form to matter is that it secures the unity of the human person and a full appreciation of its essential bodiliness. But by uniting the soul to body in this way, it must immediately be wondered (and it was in Aquinas's day) whether such a view is compatible with the spirituality and immortality of the soul. Normally substantial forms that are the actuality of matter cannot exist without matter. Beings that are composed of form and matter are subject to dissolution and corruption. In material substances, neither the matter nor the form can exist independently of the other. So if the human person were a material substance, it would dissolve with the corruption of the body. Obviously such a conclusion would be unacceptable because it would make human immortality deeply problematic. It might be possible to argue that God could re-create the soul after death, but this would not cohere with the traditional doctrine that personal immortality requires the endurance or survival of the soul through the event of bodily death. Aquinas does not think, however, that his rejection of dualism commits him to some kind of materialism.[11] He thinks that the soul maintains its

[8] Aquinas sometimes refers to the soul as an intellectual substance, but he is careful also to point out that the human soul does not meet all the requirements for being a substance and can only be designated as such in a qualified sense. See Bazan's "La corporalité selon Saint Thomas." He has made this same point more recently in "The Human Soul: Form *and* Substance? Thomas Aquinas' Critique of Eclectic Aristotelianism," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997): 95-126. See also Michael Sweeney, "Soul as Substance and Method in Aquinas's Anthropological Writings," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 66 (1999): 143-187.

[9] SC 2, ad 16. See also ST I, 75, 4.

[10] ST I, 75, 2 ad 2.

[11] For an interesting account of how Aquinas's views show the inadequacy of the contemporary dichotomy of dualism against materialism, see Eleonore Stump, "Non-Cartesian Dualism and

existence through physical death because its existence is not dependent upon the body. This means that the human soul is not a substantial form like the kind found in material substances, but has the unique status of being a form in matter that is nonetheless not a material form dependent upon matter for its existence. It is rather the case that the human soul as the substantial form of the person has existence through itself (*per se*) and not through being the form of a body; because this is so, the soul can be said to subsist on its own and survive the death of the body. Here we are clearly beyond anything Aristotle ever considered and in the domain of the Thomistic metaphysical account of the person. It is to this metaphysical account that we must now turn.

*B. The Spirituality and Immortality of the Soul*

Aquinas's argument for the immortality of the soul proceeds in three stages. First, he establishes that the human soul must be immaterial in order to be the principle of knowledge. Second, he argues that if the soul has an activity (intellection) that is independent of the body, then it must have existence through itself rather than through the composite and so subsist through itself (*per se*). Third, he shows that since the soul exists through itself, it is incorruptible. But is the incorruptibility of the soul enough to secure personal immortality given the previous definition of the person as a soul-body unity? It will be the purpose of this section to consider these topics in turn.

The argument for the immateriality of the intellect[12] presupposes the basic Aristotelian view that knowledge is a kind of intentional union between the knower and the known wherein the knower becomes cognitively identical with the form of what is known without physically becoming the object. When the knower becomes one with the form of what is known, no transitive action occurs in the object, but rather the change occurs immanently or intentionally in the knower as the intellect in act becomes one with the form of the object. The natural horizon of human knowledge is the material world, and the human intellect is naturally suited to grasping the forms or essences of corporeal things. Aquinas thinks that the intellect's capacity to become cognitively identical with the entire range of material essences entails that it cannot itself be a material essence. The reason for this claim is that it is of the very nature of a corporeal thing to be exclusively and determinately what it is. The substantial form that makes the being to be this determinate kind of being also excludes it from being something else. Material substances are thus characterized by an other-excluding indeterminacy: the form that makes a rock be a rock excludes it from having the form of a flower. For a

Materialism without Reductionism," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 505-531. For a more ambitious attempt in this vein, see David Braine, *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), especially 480-531.

[12] Two helpful accounts of Aquinas's position are Herbert McCabe, "The Immortality of the Soul," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Anthony Kenny (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1969), 297-306 and Kenneth L. Schmitz "Purity of Soul and Immortality," *The Monist* 69 (1986): 396-415. A useful classification of Aquinas's arguments with some critical commentary can be found in David Ruel Foster, "Aquinas on the Immateriality of the Intellect," *The Thomist* 55 (1991): 415-438. Negative verdicts on Aquinas's reasoning can be found in Joseph A. Novak, "Aquinas on the Incorruptibility of the Soul," *The History of Philosophy Quarterly* 4 (1987): 405-42 and Robert Pasnau, "Aquinas and the Content Fallacy," *The Modern Schoolman* 76 (1998): 293-314.

material being to take on another substantial form would be for it to actually or physically become another kind of being through corruption and generation. Hence the intellect's experienced capacity to become cognitively one with the forms of other beings reveals that it has a non-material indeterminacy or openness that is an indicator of its immateriality and spirituality. Within the Thomistic view, knowledge as formal identity between knower and known resists explanation through a materialistic or reductionistic account. The capacity to grasp the essential or universal features of a material object through intentional formal identity cannot be reduced to a physiological account of sensation ending in a brain event, though such a physical process is a necessary condition for knowledge. Knowing is not a physical interaction between two bodies. Nor is the presence of form in the mind like the having of an image or picture in the mind. As is well known, representationalist accounts of knowledge raise insoluble problems regarding the relevant sense of resemblance and the grounds for asserting it. Within the Thomistic view, the only adequate resource for grounding the realistic claim that we know the natures of other things are the very forms of those things; that which explains how we know something must be its form or we will not be able to account for how we really know it. Thus the only adequate explanation for knowing as formal identity is a non-material or spiritual capacity of the intellect.

The second stage of the argument is to show that the human soul's capacity to perform an immaterial activity that is independent of the body is grounds for asserting that its existence is independent of body. Aquinas puts the nerve of the argument this way:

> Accordingly the very intellectual principle that is called mind or intellect has an operation through itself (*per se*) independent of the body. But nothing can be active through itself unless its subsists through itself. For nothing can be active unless it is in act, and in the same way that something is active it is.[13]

The basic Thomistic principle presumed in this account is that the activity of something is revelatory of its being or that action displays being (*agere sequitur esse*). If the soul has an activity independent of body, then it must be able to exist independent of body. Because the soul acts through itself (*per se*) it must exist or subsist through itself (*per se*). It must be noted in all this that the argument moves from the immaterial *activity* of the soul to its independent existence and not from the mere immateriality of soul. All forms and all souls are by definition non-material, but that does not mean that they can exist independently of matter. In order to draw that conclusion, it is necessary to show that they can *act* independently of matter.

The third stage of the argument, wherein the true metaphysical structure of the person is disclosed, shows how the capacity of the soul to subsist *per se* is a guarantee of its incorruptibility. The text of Aquinas's argument is as follows:

> The human soul can only be corrupted *per se*. Yet this is completely impossible not only for the human soul, but for anything subsisting that is form alone. For it

[13] ST I, 75, 2.

> is evident that whatever belongs to something through itself is inseparable from it. But existence (*esse*) belongs to the form that is actual through itself. Hence matter acquires *esse* in act insofar as it acquires form and corruption occurs in it insofar as it is separated from form. But it is impossible that form be separated from itself. Hence it is impossible that a subsisting form cease to exist.[14]

Aquinas's argument involves a central contrast between the way that form mediates the act of existing (*esse*) in things that can subsist independent of matter and in things that cannot. In both cases *esse*, which is related to form as act to potency, is mediated and determined by form; form specifies and limits the *esse* to be this particular kind of *esse*. But in forms which subsist, the *esse* belongs to them first and immediately, and then derivatively to the composite. In forms which do not subsist, their *esse* belongs to them only as part of the composite. In other words, in forms which do not subsist, the form cannot exercize its causality with respect to *esse* independently of matter; when the composite disintegrates, then the form can no longer exist. But in the case of a subsisting form, its causality of *esse* is independent of matter, and so it does not cease to be when it is separated from matter. When Aquinas says that it is impossible for a subsistent form to lose its *esse* because that would be for it to lose itself, he means that since its causation of *esse* does not depend on some separate or extrinsic element, it belongs to its very nature as form to receive and specify *esse*. While a subsistent form depends upon the efficient causality of God to conserve it in *esse* and is subject to possible annihilation by God, Aquinas argues that God has ordained an order of things wherein subsistent forms have their *esse* in a perpetual way once they are created immediately by God.[15]

Proof that the human soul is incorruptible and survives the death of the body does not, however, automatically settle the question of immortality for either the soul or the person. To prove that the soul persists in existence after the dissolution of the body does not entail that it has continuing vital activities. What sorts of activities could a disembodied soul engage in? The question is perplexing for Aquinas since although he holds that the human intellect has an activity that is independent of the body, nevertheless he also holds that that activity is dependent upon sense images or phantasms. The human intellect is naturally ordered to the abstraction of intelligible meaning from sense images and the dependence on phantasms is permanent. The intellect does not require phantasms only as the origin of knowledge, as if once it abstracted the essence it could thereafter think without involving a phantasm any more, but rather the intellect requires the phantasm as a ongoing reference point for knowing; all knowing involves some kind of turning to a phantasm.[16] As noted earlier, it is precisely this feature of human knowing that explains why it is natural for the human soul to be in a body. But what then of a human soul that is separated from the body and so deprived of

[14] ST I, 75, 6. For a penetrating commentary on the key point in this text, see Joseph Owens, "Aquinas on the Inseparability of Soul from Existence," *New Scholasticism* 61 (1987): 249-270.

[15] Aquinas derives the claim that each individual soul is directly created by God from the claim that the soul is immaterial and subsisting. No material power can produce an immaterial soul. See ST I, 118, 2. This topic is discussed more fully on pp. 86–88.

[16] ST I, 84, 7.

its natural mode of access to intelligible objects? How could it possibly know anything if it cannot turn to phantasms? It would seem then that a disembodied human soul could not perform any natural intellectual activity.

This apparent contradiction between Aquinas's theory of knowledge and the soul's immortality vexed Aquinas throughout his career.[17] His solution to the problem is based on the claim that since the separated soul has a different mode of being when separate from the body, it would therefore have a different mode of knowing that would be more like that of naturally separate intellectual substances (angels) than like the mode of knowing that is natural to it as united to the body. Aquinas writes:

> It must be considered that since nothing acts except insofar as it is in act, the mode of anything's activity follows from its mode of being. Now the human soul has another mode of being when it is united to the body than when it is separate from the body, even though it maintains its nature as soul. This does not imply, however, that it is accidental to the soul that it be united to the body because it is united to the body according to its very nature. . . .Thus according to the mode of being that the soul has when united to the body, the mode of knowing by turning to the phantasms of bodies which are in bodily organs belongs to it. But when the soul is separated from the body, the mode of knowing through conversion to what is purely intelligible belongs to it as in the case of other separated intelligences. To sum up, the mode of knowing by turning to sense images is natural to the soul, as is being united to the body. But to be separated from the body is contrary to its nature and similarly to know without turning to phantasms is contrary to its nature. Accordingly, the soul is united to the body both so that it might be and act in accord with its nature.[18]

What is most significant about Aquinas's attempt to account for intellectual activity in a separated soul is that even though this involves attributing to it an objectively higher mode of knowledge, akin to angelic knowledge through divinely infused species, nonetheless this kind of knowing actually results in diminished intellectual activity because it is unnatural and alien to the soul. As noted in the last line of the above text, the soul is united to the body in order to be and act in accord with its nature. Apart from the body, the soul's being and acting are unnatural. So in contrast to Platonic anthropology, where release from the body allows the soul to enjoy a higher kind of activity that accords with its true nature, separation from the body in Thomistic anthropology results in diminished intellectual capacity. When Aquinas compares the range and perspicuity of the separated soul's intellectual activity to that of the soul as united to the body, it is diminished in every domain except self-knowledge and the knowledge of other separated souls.[19] When it comes to every other kind of intelligible object, even God, the separated soul's cognitive capacity is diminished because of its separation from sense

[17] See Anton Pegis, "The Separated Soul and its Nature in St. Thomas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas. 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies.* Volume I., ed. Armand Maurer et alia (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 130-158.

[18] ST I, 89, 1.

[19] ST I, 89, 2.

images. In the case of material essences, for example, the separated soul's knowledge is only general and confused.[20] As Mary Rousseau has pointed out, the cognitive limitations of the separated soul have wide ranging and pessimistic implications for its quality of life because almost all genuine human goods depend upon the natural capacity of the soul to know through turning to sense images: "Notable among these other diminished goods are rationality; the intellectual virtues other than science, especially prudence; our natural knowledge of God; conscience; freedom of choice and passion as prerequisites to moral virtue, thus moral virtue generally; and love in its specifically human form of the free choice by which we have dominion over our acts."[21] Thus the human soul separated from the body at death is but a shadow of its former self, diminished in nearly every way, and significantly less than a full human person.

The immortality of the soul is clearly not the same as the immortality of the person. For there to be true personal immortality, the soul must recover its body. Only as united to a body can the soul enjoy the kind of being and activity that are truly human. Aquinas therefore draws the conclusion that personal immortality requires the resurrection of the body:

> It was shown in the second book [c. 79] that the souls of human beings are immortal. Hence they will survive when they are freed from their bodies. Yet it is also clear from what was said in the second book [c. 68, 83] that the soul is naturally united to the body because it is the form of the body according to its essence. It is therefore against the nature of the soul to be without the body. But nothing that is contrary to nature can be perpetual. Accordingly the soul will not be without the body perpetually. Yet since it endures perpetually, it is necessary that it again be joined to the body, which is the meaning of resurrection. Hence the immortality of souls seems to require the future resurrection of bodies.[22]

Aquinas does not think that this kind of reasoning shows that God absolutely must rejoin the soul to the body through resurrection. The point of such reasoning is not to show that God must raise the bodies of the dead but rather to explain why God does do so. As a free and gratuitous choice of God's will, resurrection is not subject to philosophical proof. What Aquinas's reasoning is meant to show instead is the tight fit between his philosophical anthropology and the theological doctrine of the resurrection of the body. According to Aquinas's anthropology, only through the resurrection of the body can there be genuine personal immortality.

In Aquinas's account of personal immortality, it is the soul that is the locus of and explanation for personal identity across life, death, and the afterlife. Aquinas's mature view on the nature of human individuality is to see it as rooted in the created *esse* that it receives from God and not dependent upon matter:

> It must be said that everything is individuated in the same way that it has *esse* . . . . Accordingly, just as the *esse* of the soul is from God as from an active

[20] ST I, 89, 3.

[21] "Elements of a Thomistic Philosophy of Death," *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 587.

[22] SCG IV, 79. See Anton Pegis, "Between Immortality and Death: Some Further Reflections on the *Summa Contra Gentiles*," *The Monist* 58 (1974): 1-15.

> principle, and in the body as to its matter, neither does the *esse* of the soul perish with the perishing of the body. So also, the individuation of the soul, even if it were to have a certain relationship to the body, does not perish at the perishing of the body.[23]

In the case of the human person, individuality is rooted in *esse* as received by the subsisting form that is the soul. As receiving and communicating *esse* to the body, the soul makes the body to be *this* body. When the soul is separated from the body it retains its individuality through its *esse*. When the soul receives a body again at the resurrection of the dead, it will cause matter to be its *own* body as it did before death.[24] According to this way of thinking, the identity of the person before and after death does not depend upon strict identity of matter in the sense that the same atoms that made up my body before my death must also be in my resurrected body. My resurrected body will be my body because it will be caused and individuated by the same subsisting soul that animates and individuates me now.[25]

A final argument for the resurrection of the body is based upon the nature of happiness as the end of life:

> It was shown in the third book [c. 25] that there is a natural desire in all humans towards happiness. Now ultimate happiness is perfect happiness. Accordingly whenever something lacks what is necessary for its perfection, it does not yet have perfect happiness because its desires have not been completely satisfied and everything imperfect naturally seeks after its perfection. Now the human soul separated from the body is imperfect like a part existing outside its whole because the soul is naturally a part of human nature. Accordingly a human being cannot achieve ultimate happiness unless it is united again to the body. This accords with what was established earlier that man cannot achieve ultimate happiness in this life.[26]

Carlos Bazan has described the need of the soul to rejoin the body in order to be completely happy as "the highest encomium of the human body" in Aquinas.[27] Even though Aquinas defines happiness as consisting essentially in the intellectual contemplation of God, nevertheless complete happiness for a human being has a bodily component, not just in this life, but also in the afterlife. Aquinas is careful to note that since the gift of the vision of the divine essence through the light of glory is the completion of human nature and in no way requires any sense images or bodily component, the essence of human happiness does not involve the body. But

[23] DA 1 ad 2. See also 2 ad 5 and 3. Joseph Owens has argued that Aquinas thinks that *esse* is the ultimate cause of the individuation of all beings, not just human souls, in his "Thomas Aquinas" in *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation (1150-1650)*, ed. Jorge Garcia (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 173-194.

[24] Aquinas does think that the souls of the blessed will animate matter in a higher mode. See CT, 168.

[25] Peter Geach endorses Aquinas's doctrine of immortality without appreciating, however, the role played by *esse* in "Immortality," *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 17-29.

[26] SCG IV, 79.

[27] "The Highest Encomium of Human Body," in *Littera, Sensus, Sententia*, ed. A Lobato (Milan: Massimo, 1991), 99-116.

he makes room for a bodily dimension of happiness by distinguishing between what belongs to the very essence of a thing's perfection and what belongs to its perfect existence.[28] While the body is not part of the essence of happiness, it is required in order for the human person to enjoy perfect existence because it is natural for the soul to be in a body. The soul enjoying the vision of God retains a desire to share its joy with the body and cannot be at perfect rest until it does so. The desire of the soul would be at rest in the beatific vision in the sense that it would have achieved the object rendering it complete. But subjectively it would not be completely satisfied until it possessed the good in every way possible to it – that is, as a human person, a soul-body composite. Such a state would not increase happiness in an intensive way, but rather in an extensive way insofar as the body now shares in the soul's beatitude. This is the highest encomium of the human body in Aquinas: not even the beatific vision of God could completely satisfy a separated soul because its eternal peace requires that it be united with the body in an ontological and operational unity. Hence the Thomistic conception of human nature is logically connected with the Thomistic conception of human destiny. What is created to exist as a soul-body unity can only be completely happy as a soul-body unity. The beatific vision for human beings must be the completion of human nature in its integrity. To that relationship between human nature and beatific vision we must now turn.

*C. Human Nature and its Supernatural Destiny*[29]

Aquinas thinks that every created being has a natural tendency to act in such a way as to achieve a state of perfection or completion relative to its kind. Because a being is the kind of being that it is, it has a corresponding natural capacity to act so as to achieve the full actuality or realization that is its good. To have a created nature is to have an end because no created being is perfect simply by being what it is but rather through self-perfective activity ordered to its proper end or good. All of creation is marked by this internal, natural, teleological dynamism. Aquinas's term for this universal tendency towards the good is natural appetite. It is important to note the necessary connection between a nature and its end: because a being is what it is, it is completed by a certain kind of activity. The end is set by the nature; it is metaphysical. Like every other nature, human nature is ordered toward a certain state that would complete or perfect it as its ultimate good. What is peculiar about the human orientation to the good, of course, is that it is characterized by intelligence and freedom. Hence the human appetite for the good is called *rational* appetite and is identified with will.[30] This does not mean, however, that human beings can choose their end; the end is determined by the nature antecedent to and independent of any conscious, intentional, or purposeful striving by a human agent.

[28] ST I-II, 4, 5 and 6.

[29] The standard book on this topic is Jorge Laporta, *La destinée de la nature humaine selon Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1965). A short masterful analysis of the problem treated in this section is Etienne Gilson, "Sur la problématique de la vision béatifique," *Archives d'histoire doctrinales et litéraire du moyen âge* 31 (1964): 67-88. See also Joseph Owens, C.S.S.R, *Human Destiny* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985).

[30] See David Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will as Rational Appetite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 559-584.

The distinction between end and purpose reveals what is distinctive about appetite in human beings: we must discover and pursue our end purposefully through free rational activity. Whether or not a person acts for the sake of his true end as determined by nature is not itself determined by nature.

When it comes to specifying the ultimate human good or beatitude, Aquinas correlates it with the rational capacity of human beings. Aquinas thinks that human happiness consists in the intellect's contemplation of the highest intelligible object – the divine. Human beings have a natural capacity to know that cannot be fulfilled by anything less than knowledge of God as the ultimate cause of all that is. So far this sounds like straight Aristotelianism, but Aquinas goes far beyond Aristotelianism in arguing that the kind of knowledge of God that is truly perfective of human nature is not the kind of philosophical knowledge of God that is the summit of metaphysics, but rather consists in an immediate vision of the very essence of God. In a passage that has proved problematic for Thomists for centuries, Aquinas writes:

> It must be said that ultimate and perfect beatitude can only be found in the vision of the divine essence. In order to show how this is so, two points need to be considered. The first is that a man is not perfectly happy when there remains something else for him to desire and seek after. The second is that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object. Now the object of the intellect is the quiddity or essence of a thing (as said in the *De anima*). Hence the perfection of the intellect is correlated to its knowledge of the essence of a thing. So if any intellect were to know the essence of some effect but be unable thereby to advance to a knowledge of the essence of the cause so that it would not know what the cause is, then the intellect could not be said to have attained full or unqualified knowledge of the cause even though it could know through the effect that the cause exists. There yet remains a natural desire in the human knower to know what the nature of the cause is when it knows something else as the effect of that cause. This desire is wonder and it causes further inquiry. . . Accordingly, if the human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, were to know of God only that God exists, it would not yet have perfection through knowing the first cause in an unqualified way and so there would remain a natural desire to know the cause. Hence a man would not yet be completely happy. In order for there to be complete happiness, it would be necessary for the intellect to arrive at the very essence of the first cause. And that perfection is achieved through union with God as its object, in which alone happiness consists.[31]

The Thomistic doctrine that every human being has a natural desire to see God is equivalent to the claim that only an immediate knowledge of the divine essence can satisfy the human intellect's capacity to know. It is not a claim about a universal conscious desire to see the essence of God, because there obviously is no such phenomenon; at the conscious level, everyone pursues some version of

[31] ST I-II, 3, 8.

beatitude but not necessarily what is truly beatific.[32] So the natural desire for God is universal in the sense that God is the only intellectual object that can complete the human person as an intellectual being. It is a metaphysical claim about the nature of created intellect as such: every created intellect (including the angels[33]) has a natural desire to see God in the sense that only a vision of the divine essence can satisfy a created intellect's infinite capacity for knowledge. Any knowledge of God less than vision, including metaphysics and even the knowledge of God that is had in this life by grace, leaves the intellect unsatisfied and longing for more.

At the same time that Aquinas argues that the only genuine completion of human nature lies in the vision of God, he also holds that such knowledge lies beyond the capacity of human nature to achieve on its own.[34] The knowledge of God that is beatifying is something that can only happen by the gracious gift of God elevating and enabling human nature to a status beyond itself. In this sense, the beatific vision is a supernatural end; that is, it is an end that is beyond the capability of human nature to achieve through its natural resources. The ultimate reason for this is that knowledge of the divine essence is only natural for God; every creature, precisely as a creature, has a finite nature that is an inadequate intellectual resource for knowing the infinite God.[35] The only way that a creature can know the essence of God is by sharing in God's own knowledge; such a sharing in God's self-knowledge is only possible by God's gracious decision to elevate the creature beyond its nature to the supernatural.

Thus emerges the thorny question that has vexed Thomists for centuries: how can the vision of the divine essence be the end of human nature if its achievement lies beyond the capacities of the nature? If the realization of the desire for God is beyond human nature or supernatural, then how can the desire be natural? If the achievement is supernatural, then it would seem that the desire must be supernatural also. If man has an end in accord with his nature, then he must have the natural capacities to achieve it because according to standard Aristotelian principles, a natural end entails a natural capacity to attain it. Accordingly, one long-standing and influential version of Thomism (tracing back to Cajetan) would argue that human nature has a natural end that is realizable by its natural capacities (imperfect beatitude) and a supernatural end that can only be realized by God's supernatural assistance (perfect beatitude). The advantage of this view is twofold: it saves the Aristotelian correlation of nature to end via natural capacities, and it saves the gratuitousness of the supernatural as something that is not due human nature but rather is a purely gratuitous gift elevating nature to a new dimension. Yet the price of such a picture is that grace then comes to seem extrinsic to human nature because the latter is completed by a natural end. What results is a two-tiered picture of man as having both a natural end and a supernatural end wherein the relationship of the latter to the former seems foreign and extrinsic. This traditional Scholastic picture was sharply and decisively criticized by Henri de Lubac in his

[32] ST I-II, 5, 8.
[33] ST I, 62, 1.
[34] ST I, 5, 5.
[35] ST I, 12, 4.

enormously influential *Surnaturel, Études historiques.*[36] DeLubac's work set the table for the nature-grace question to become the central issue in Roman Catholic theology for a long period thereafter. While a review of that debate lies beyond this book, what is important here is to note that while some Thomists continued to defend the traditional Neoscholastic position, others correctly saw that a better solution would be to get out from behind the historical problematic that originally inspired the older Neoscholastic interpretations and go back to the original position of Aquinas.

Aquinas's view of human nature and human destiny is decided un-Aristotelian and the Aristotelians of his day recognized this and opposed it as such. Aristotelian man does have an end achievable by natural capacities in this life; Thomistic man does not. Thomistic man has a spiritual or intellectual capacity that cannot be satisfied by his natural capacities or in this life. The Thomistic picture of human destiny therefore requires both the elevating action of God and immortality in order to account for how we achieve our true end. In sorting through this question it is important to distinguish between what can be established on philosophical grounds and what can be established on theological or faith-in-revelation-based grounds. When Aquinas offers the argument that the beatific vision is the end of human nature, he rests his case on an analysis of human knowing: only a knowledge of the essence of the first cause can satisfy the intellect's desire to know. This claim purports to rest on philosophical grounds, even though it is obviously inspired by faith; hence it is a prime example of Christian philosophy because it is a case where Christian faith leads to the establishment of a philosophical conclusion that would probably not have otherwise been discovered. But having established that only an immediate vision of God can completely perfect human nature and recognizing that such a vision surpasses natural human capacities, reason must then recognize that it can say no more. As Aquinas puts it, all that reason can say is that the natural desire cannot be in vain.[37] This means simply that such a vision is possible given the nature of the human intellect. Reason can say nothing, however, about whether the end is attained or how it is attained. It is only on the basis of faith that we know that God has freely willed that we attain our end and provided the means (grace and glory) whereby we might achieve it. What is proportioned to man in coming to his end is not the ability to achieve it, but rather the capacity to turn freely to the gracious invitation of God to raise him up to it.[38] For while we need grace to arrive at our end, God does not give it to us apart from our free will.[39]

Since human nature is created by God to be completed in grace and glory, there must be an openness or capacity within human nature for supernatural fulfillment. Precisely how to characterize that openness to transcendence has been a matter of considerable debate among Thomists because it is correlated to the position that

[36] (Paris: Aubier, 1946). Perhaps the most perspicuous Thomistic philosophical response to DeLubac was Anton Pegis, "Nature and Spirit: Some Reflections on the Problem of the End of Man," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 23 (1949): 62-79.

[37] ST I, 12, 1.

[38] See Pegis, "Nature and Spirit," 73.

[39] On this topic see Bernard Lonergan's *Grace and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

one takes on the relationship between nature and grace. As noted earlier, human nature does not have a natural potency to achieve the supernatural; the capacity for grace is therefore not like the other natural capacities that we have to evolve in conformity with our nature. Since this is the case, and because they wanted to safeguard the gratuitousness of grace, Cajetanian Thomists described human nature as having only an obediential potency to grace understood as a purely passive capacity to be transformed and elevated by the supernatural action of God. Yet careful study of Aquinas's own texts have shown that he did not think the concept of obediential potency was apt to describe the relationship of human nature to grace.[40] For Aquinas, an obediential potency describes the openness of a created nature to the miraculous action of God to something beyond its nature. The relationship of human nature to grace, however, is not like that. Grace is not a miracle, like stone becoming bread, but rather the fulfillment of our nature. We are created for grace and glory as the fulfillment of our nature. So the human openness to the divine is neither mere non-repugnance nor a naturally realizable capacity. We are created as open to, apt for, and indeed ordered to beatific vision because we are created in the image of God. The God who creates our nature is the very God who graciously intends to share his own life with us. In that sense, creation is ordered by God to find fulfillment in grace.[41]

## II. TRANSCENDENTAL THOMISM: RAHNER'S HEARER OF THE WORD

### *A. Rahner's Theological Context*

The most influential theological voice to emerge out of the post-World War II nature-grace debate was the German Jesuit Karl Rahner, and it is precisely within that context that Rahner's work is best approached.[42] In his seminal 1950 essay "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,"[43] Rahner tries to steer a middle course between the traditional Neoscholastic account of the nature-grace relationship, which he regards as promoting extrinsecism because it too sharply separates the two domains, and the approach of *la nouvelle théologie*, which he regards as erring in the opposite direction by blurring the necessary distinction between the two orders.[44] Central both to Rahner's critique of traditional or textbook treatments and his own approach is the calling into question of the very

[40] Gilson and LaPorta both make this point.

[41] The problem of human finality has recently been the object of debate again because of the publication of Denis Bradley's *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997). I discuss Bradley's thesis, with which I am in sympathy, in Chapter Six. More traditional readings of Aquinas are offered by Stephen Long in "On the Possibility of a Purely Natural End for Man," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 211-237 and Peter A. Pagan-Aguiar, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Human Finality: Paradox or *Mysterium Fidei*?" *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 375-399.

[42] "If any single topic offers the best access to Rahner's immensely prolific and varied work, it is surely the nature/grace controversy." Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 179.

[43] *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 297-318.

[44] Richard Reno describes Rahner's position as formally extrinsicist because he distinguishes nature and grace but materially intrinsicist because of the tight fit between human longing and grace in *The Ordinary Transformed: Karl Rahner and the Christian Vision of Transcendence* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 109-133.

possibility of giving an account of human nature in the traditional sense wherein "it is tacitly or explicitly presupposed that whatever man comes to know by himself (independently of Revelation) about himself or in himself belongs to his 'nature' (because 'supernatural' and 'knowable by verbal Revelation alone' are identified as a matter of course), and that so a sharply circumscribed concept of man's nature can be produced out of the anthropology of everyday experience and of metaphysics."[45] The traditional view presupposes the identity of the human being as concretely experienced and understood philosophically independently of revelation with human nature and contrasts this with the supernatural as formally revealed. Rahner challenges this assumption by arguing that it is not possible to distill out of concrete human existence what belongs to us by nature and what belongs to us by grace because we have been called to a supernatural destiny by God. Rahner's approach is governed by the theological assumption that human existence and human history as we know and experience it unfold within the context of God's free decision to call every human being to a supernatural life. There has never been a human person living in a state of pure nature outside of salvation history or unordered to grace. How then can we know what a "pure nature" would be like? The traditional answer, that philosophical reflection independent of revelation identifies the natural, begs the question: how do we know that what we can determine philosophically about human nature is not itself true precisely because we are actually ordered to grace and so is indeed implicitly supernatural even though not formally supernatural?

Rahner's fundamental conviction is that since the end of human existence is the vocation to enter into a love relationship with God, it follows that our orderedness to that supernatural end must be fundamentally constitutive of our human existence. Rahner writes:

> *Must* not what God decrees for man be *eo ipso* an interior ontological constituent of his concrete quiddity 'terminative', even if it is not a constituent of his 'nature'? For an ontology which grasps the truth that man's concrete quiddity depends utterly on God, is not his binding disposition *eo ipso* not just a juridical decree of God but precisely what man *is*, hence not just an imperative proceeding from God but man's most inward depths? If God gives creation and man above all a supernatural end and this end is first 'in intentione', then man (and the world) *is* by that very fact always and everywhere inwardly other in structure than he would be if he did not have this end, and hence other as well before he has reached this end partially (the grace which justifies) or wholly (the beatific vision).[46]

Because God has created human beings with a supernatural destiny, God therefore constitutes them with an openness, capacity, aptitude, and indeed a dynamism towards that end. This obediential potency to divine Love is the center and root of human existence. It is a universal feature of every person that permeates and pervades all of human existence and activity. Borrowing from his teacher Martin

[45] Ibid., 299.
[46] Ibid., 302-3.

Heidegger, Rahner describes this openness to the divine as an existential (*existenzial*) of human being. What this term is meant to highlight is that openness to God is not a contingent or chosen mode of being human, but rather a fundamental, constitutive, *a priori* determination of human being: "The capacity for the God of self-bestowing, personal love is the central and abiding existential of man as he really is."[47] As an existential feature of human being, it is universally present even in those who freely deny or repudiate God; it is prior to grace as the precondition of grace.[48]

But while the capacity for God is an existential of human *being*, it is not an existential of human *nature*. The inner directedness of human being to grace cannot be a feature of human nature because then the supernatural would lose its character as unmerited grace and instead be something due or owed by God to human nature. It is precisely this point that differentiates Rahner from *la nouvelle théologie* and Aquinas: the inner dynamism of human being toward God cannot be a feature of human nature but rather must itself be supernatural. Rahner agrees with *la nouvelle théologie* that if God wills a supernatural end for man then he must also give him a positive and dynamic orientation to that end, but he rejects the claim that the disposition in question is natural: "the longing for, the ordination to, God's love, this existential for supernatural grace, only allows grace to be unexacted grace when it is itself unexacted, and at the moment when, fulfilled by grace, it becomes conscious of itself *as* supernatural, i.e. shines forth as unexacted by the real man, not owed him."[49] The supernatural existential is thus the freely bestowed universal capacity of human being to share in the divine life that is the precondition for a conscious and freely willed relationship with God. As Rahner specifies, the recognition of the supernatural existential precisely as supernatural is the gift of grace. Prior to the human being's acceptance of grace, the existential is experienced as a non-supernatural *a priori* feature of human being that is accessible to human reason independent of revelation.

Because the supernatural existential is the dominant feature of human being as constituted by God in this supernatural order, it is therefore impossible to determine precisely what is supernatural in human existence and what is natural. This does not mean, however, that Rahner wants to banish the concept of nature from his theological vocabulary. Indeed, Rahner argues that theology must retain the conception of human nature in order to maintain the gratuitousness of the supernatural. While we cannot give any determinate content to the concept of human nature because we cannot know what human beings without a supernatural vocation would have been like, nonetheless the concept of human nature expresses the counterfactual possibility that God could have willed an order wherein human beings were not called to share God's own life. Rahner describes nature so understood as a theological remainder concept (*Restbegriff*) designating what human nature minus its supernatural existence would have been like. It probably goes without saying that Rahner's evacuation of any determinate content from his notion of human nature such that a purely philosophical account of nature no

[47] Ibid., 312.

[48] This claim has obvious implications for an approach to non-Christian religions that will be explored in Chapter Eight.

[49] Ibid., 313.

longer is a necessary moment in the articulation of grace marks a decisive break not only with Neoscholasticism but also Aquinas himself.

From this cursory account of Rahner's response to the nature-grace problem the agenda of Rahner's theological anthropology can be seen in clear focus. Rahner's anthropology starts with the presupposition that we are addressed by God with the Word of Salvation. Given the correlation between human being and grace, the anthropological task is to articulate the intimate fit between the two by identifying the *a priori* features of human existence that constitute its openness to or directness towards grace. Rahner wants to show how Christian claims about the fulfillment of human existence in the Mystery of God's love cohere with the deepest structural features of human experience (how could it be otherwise, since the latter is for the sake of the former?). There is something of an apologetic intention in Rahner's project directed both to those inside and outside of the community of the Church.[50] In both cases, the aim is to show how the Christian message correlates with a universal dynamism of the human spirit towards the Absolute through a transcendental analysis of human experience. The point of the transcendental analysis is to move from some given experience, in this case Revelation, to an articulation of the *a priori* conditions of human subjectivity that must be invoked in order to explain how that experience is possible. In opting for a transcendental approach that begins with human subjectivity, Rahner hopes to provide an account of Christian anthropology that will be congenial to those who accept the basic philosophical presuppositions of modernity. Rahner appropriates philosophical themes from Kant, Hegel, and especially Heidegger in his early anthropological work and it reflects a thoroughly German philosophical world view. Readers who are unwilling to grant Rahner those background assumptions will have a hard time making sense of his presentation.[51]

There is one more correlationist agenda that deeply influences Rahner's anthropology, especially in its early formulations: the endeavor to show how a transcendental approach could be essentially faithful to the thought of Thomas Aquinas. This was the general approach adopted by the movement known as Transcendental Thomism and Rahner was much influenced by his predecessor Jesuits Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Marechal.[52] As noted earlier, Transcendental Thomism rests on the conviction that the contemporary relevance of Thomism requires it to accept the modern turn to the subject as its starting point. The task is then to show how it is possible to begin with the immanent realm of subjectivity and still conclude to some form of epistemological and metaphysical realism that could lay claim to continuity with Aquinas. All Transcendental Thomists employ some form of a transcendental argument that begins with an analysis of subjectivity and then goes on to argue that the *a priori* conditions for the very possibility of human knowing and willing require the postulation of metaphysical conclusions akin to Aquinas. In each case, the central *a priori* feature of human subjectivity is some form of spiritual dynamism towards the Absolute that not only

[50] See Nicholas H. Healy, "Indirect Methods in Theology: Karl Rahner as an Ad Hoc Apologist," *The Thomist* 56 (1992): 613-630.

[51] Rahner's style of thinking, and Transcendental Thomism in general, is not at all congenial to Analytical Thomists.

[52] See the overview in Chapter One, pp. 13–16.

philosophically requires a realistic metaphysics, but also serves the overarching theological purpose of showing how Christian claims answer to the deepest dynamic dimensions of human subjectivity transcendentally conceived. The Transcendental Thomist project endeavors to show that the modern self is not a self-enclosed autonomous absolute, but rather a dynamic openness to the Absolute Self. In this vein, Rahner's first major work, *Spirit in the World*, was an extended commentary on *Summa theologiae* I, 84,7 designed to show how Aquinas's analysis of human intellection as inextricably grounded in the horizon of sensibility (hence the ongoing need for the phantasm) and issuing forth in a judgment by the intellect involves an implicit pre-conceptual grasp (*Vorgriff*) of Infinite *Esse* when it is reconceived through transcendental lenses.[53]

More important for the purposes of this chapter is Rahner's second major work, *Hearer of the Word*, which originated in a summer lecture series in 1937 and was eventually published in its first German edition in 1941.[54] This book provides the best access to Rahner's anthropology in the entire Rahnerian corpus.[55] Rahner would grow much as a theologian in the years to come, but it is fair to say that the philosophical basis of his anthropology remained largely constant and finds its fullest expression in *Hearer of the Word*. In the light of Rahner's subsequent development of the supernatural existential, however, *Hearer of the Word* cannot be considered an exploration of human nature but rather is a philosophical exploration of what can be known of human subjectivity without explicit recourse to Revelation. It is an analysis of what must be *a priori* true of the human being if it is a hearer of the Word. Given that revelation has occurred, what must be true about human subjectivity for us to recognize and receive the Word as attractive? As Joseph A. DiNoia puts it: "The message of revelation – the divine self-communication – travels air waves, so to speak, which are already in place. Revelation does not invade into human reality as something utterly alien but as something to which human beings are already attuned."[56] How this is so will be outlined in the following account of *Hearer of the Word*.

*B. Human Being as Hearer of the Word*

In setting up the problematic of *Hearer of the Word*, Rahner raises the question of the relationship between philosophy and theology. He argues that both disciplines share a common epistemological foundation in the human knower and so an inquiry into the knowing subject is the key to understanding the

[53] *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

[54] The second revised edition was published in German in 1963 and translated into English as *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969). The revised edition bears such a strong imprint of Johannes Baptist Metz, a former student to whom Rahner entrusted the revisions, that it is not clear where Rahner leaves off and Metz begins. Because of Metz's heavy hand, and because some Rahner scholars think that Richards's translation is not entirely reliable, Joseph Donceel did a new translation of the first edition that has been published as *Hearer of the Word*, edited and with an introduction by Andrew Tallon (New York: Continuum, 1994). In what follows I shall be refering to this translation because I am persuaded by Donceel and Tallon that it is a more accurate reflection of Rahner's thought.

[55] "In *Hearer of the Word* we have the single most accessible and necessary book of philosophy and pretheology Rahner ever wrote." Andrew Tallon, "Editor's Introduction," xix.

[56] "Karl Rahner," in *The Modern Theologians*, Second Edition, ed. David Ford (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 124.

interrelationship between philosophy and theology. Philosophy of religion thus reduces to metaphysical anthropology: "The question about the philosophy of religion becomes the question why we cannot refrain from turning to metaphysics, what metaphysics is, and how human metaphysics leads up to God."[57] By doing metaphysical anthropology we will establish how it is "*a priori* possible for us to hear an eventual revelation from God."[58] Rahner criticizes traditional fundamental theology because it considers revelation apart from the *a priori*; before we can appeal to revelation itself, we need to explain how we are open to hearing it. Rahner blurs the lines between fundamental theology and philosophy of religion by describing them as having a common task: the articulation of the ontology of our obediental potency for the free revelation from God. Both disciplines pursue the same task under different formalities. Philosophy of religion as metaphysical anthropology has an internal dynamism to be completed in theology because it prepares the way for listening to Revelation. Philosophy of religion is meant to be sublated into Christian theology as a kind of proto-theology or *praeparatio evangelica*. At this point in his career, Rahner is consciously trying to steer a middle course between the Protestant extremes represented by Schleiermacher and Barth. Rahner divorces himself from Schleiermacher's project because Revelation is more than the objectification of our inner experience; it utterly transcends the human and so is not simply a correlate to our feeling of absolute dependence. Against Barth, Rahner wants to argue that grace does not break into nature in a violent or shattering way because human existence is an openness to grace.

The purpose of Rahner's metaphysical anthropology then is to show how the openness to being that is the human person is really the openness to grace because it is an openness to Absolute Being. The human being is the being who asks the question of being and what Rahner wants to uncover are the latent *a priori* conditions for our asking of the question of the being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*). The question of metaphysics is unavoidable for us because being is implicated in all of our knowing and speaking. To say that some *S is P* implicitly presupposes some unexpressed knowledge of being as a precondition: "Every statement is a statement about some being. Hence it occurs against the background of a previous, although unthematic knowing of being in general."[59] In exploring the meaning of being we must inevitably pass through an analysis of the being of the questioner of being so that metaphysics is inseparable from anthropology. Metaphysics is anthropology and anthropology is metaphysics.

Because human questioning of the meaning of being presupposes an unthematized knowledge of being as its precondition, we can conclude that there is an intimate connection between knowing and being. Being is luminous to knowing as intelligible. Rahner correlates the intrinsic connection of knowing to being with the Thomistic claim that truth is a transcendental feature of being (*omne ens est verum*). Being is intrinsically related to mind. Rahner concludes that the *a priori* correlation of being to knowing is an indication of their original unity and identity. According to Rahner, being is knowing and knowing is the original unity of being:

[57] *Hearer of the Word*, 5.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] Ibid., 26.

"to the nature of being belongs a relation of knowing with regard to itself. And the other way around: the knowing that belongs to the self-constitution of being, is the self-presence of being."[60] Being is fundamentally luminous self-presence in knowledge.[61] Rahner then shows how this fundamental thesis coheres with the thought of Thomas Aquinas. As we have already seen, Aquinas thinks knowing is a union in being between the knower and the known. Aquinas also sometimes describes knowledge as a return of the subject to itself (*reditio subjecti in seipsum*).[62] Hence Rahner concludes that his position accords with Aquinas on the following point: "Knowing essentially takes place through the return of the knowing subject into itself; it is a coming-to-oneself, a self-presence."[63]

The identification of being with luminous self-presence in knowledge must face a formidable *prima facie* objection: it is manifest that not all being is knowing self-presence. There are beings who are not knowers. And there are knowers who are not luminously self-present – the human person who is undertaking the inquiry and making the general claim! Rahner acknowledges this challenge but argues that rather than undermining the general claim about the nature of being, what these phenomena reveal is that being as luminous self-presence is not realized in every being in the same way. In God, being as luminous self-presence is fully realized as the strict identity of knowing and being. But in finite knowers such as us, being is mixed with non-being. Hence being is an analogical concept; there are different degrees of being corresponding to different degrees of self-presence. The notion of self-presence comprises two moments: an outward expansion or emanation and a return or reintegration. The more immanent the self-expression and self-possession are, the higher the being is. We can only go out and come back to ourselves in dialectic with the sensible world. We come to ourselves as knowing and subsisting subjects over against objects in the world about which we form judgements invoking being. This mode of being and knowing is a mark of our finitude because it is not completely luminous, immanent self-presence.

Yet in the midst of our finite knowing there is a latent awareness of Absolute Being as the very condition for finite knowing. Rahner's argument for this begins with an analysis of the *a priori* conditions of our knowledge of universals. How is it that we recognize that the quiddity which we encounter in a singular instance is not restricted or limited to that instance? To put the question in traditional Thomistic terms, what explains how the agent intellect is able to abstract the universal from the particular? Rahner defines abstraction as "to know that the quiddity given in the individual object is unlimited, in this sense that we grasp it as a possible determination of other individual objects."[64] The key phenomenon in abstraction is the intellect's ability to recognize limitation as such. What explains our awareness of limitation and finitude in what we know? Rahner argues that the recognition of limit as such implies that the mind must have some prior awareness

[60] Ibid., 30.

[61] "Erkennen ist Beisichsein des Seins, und dieses Beisichsein ist das Sein das Seinden" is the way Rahner puts it in *Spirit in the World*, 69.

[62] It should be noted that when Aquinas uses this kind of language to describe knowing, he is consciously adopting a Neoplatonic formulation from the *Liber de causis* to describe self-knowledge.

[63] *Hearer of the Word*, 33.

[64] Ibid., 46.

of what is beyond the limited. The mind must be able to grasp more than is present in what is limited to explain its recognition of the limited as limited. Rahner describes the intellect's capacity for recognizing limitation in any object of knowledge or act of knowledge as requiring an implicit prior awareness of an unlimited horizon or backdrop. The intellect is always aware of a "more" or surplus of intelligibility that Rahner describes as the "absolute range of all knowable objects as such."[65] The precondition to knowing limit cannot itself be limited because then we would still have to ask the question of how we recognized limit there as well. The recognition of limit and finitude ultimately requires a backdrop that is itself unlimited and infinite.

Rahner describes this implicit awareness of the unlimited that is the horizon for all human knowing as the *Vorgriff*. In his own words:

> We must explain more clearly what is meant by the *Vorgriff*. It is an *a priori* power given with human nature. It is the dynamic movement [*dynamischen Hinbewegung*] of the spirit toward the absolute range of all possible objects. In this movement [*Hinbewegung*], the single objects are grasped as single stages of this finality [*Zielbewegung*]; thus they are known as profiled [*in Vorblick*] against this absolute range of all the knowable. On account of the *Vorgriff* the single object is always already known under the horizon of the absolute ideal of knowledge and posited within the conscious domain of all that which may be known.[66]

It is important to note Rahner's stress on the intellect's relationship to the *Vorgriff* as one of dynamic tending; the language of finality underscores the idea that it is of the very nature of human intellect to strive towards the unlimited *Vorgriff*.

Rahner asserts that what is implicitly grasped in the *Vorgriff* is not an object of knowledge in the usual sense, and that indeed our awareness of the *Vorgriff* is not an act of knowing in the usual sense. We reach out toward the *Vorgriff* but do not grasp it as an object. We are conscious of the *Vorgriff* as the *a priori* condition of our knowledge of objects. We are only aware of the *Vorgriff* precisely as the backdrop of our knowledge of objects; we have no immediate or intuitive access to the *Vorgriff*. What must be guarded against here is the tendency to intepret the prefix *vor-* (*Vorgriff* comes from *vor-greifen*, literally to pre-grasp but in the sense of anticipate) in a temporal sense when Rahner intends it in an *a priori* transcendental sense.

Rahner distinguishes his claim about the *Vorgriff* from any kinship with Platonic, Kantian, or Hegelian theses; it does not refer to a Platonic Idea, a Kantian Ideal of Reason, or a stage on the road to Absolute Spirit. Rahner instead identifies the horizon intended in the *Vorgriff* with actual Infinite Being as the pre-condition for our capacity to recognize finite being as such. Rahner argues that only an awareness of real infinite being can make sense of our capacity to judge real finite being. The horizon cannot be merely possible being or non-being. Having

[65] Ibid., 47.
[66] Ibid., 47-48.

identified the *Vorgriff* with infinite being itself, Rahner then makes the crucial move of identifying the *Vorgriff* with God:

> The same necessity that drives us to anticipate being as such makes us co-affirm the infinite being of God. It is true that the *Vorgriff* does not immediately put God as an object before the mind, since, as the condition of the possibility of all knowledge of objects, the *Vorgriff* itself never represents an object in itself. But in this *Vorgriff* as the necessary and always already fulfilled condition of every human knowledge and action, the existence of absolute being, hence of God, is always already co-affirmed, even though not represented. . . . It [Absolute Being] is co-affirmed as real, since it cannot be grasped as objectively merely possible, and since the *Vorgriff* intends primarily not merely possible, but real being. In this sense we may say and must say: the *Vorgriff* aims at God. Not as if it intended God so immediately that it should immediately represent the absolute being in its own self, as an object, and make this being immediately known in itself. The *Vorgriff* intends God's absolute being in this sense that the absolute being is always basically co-affirmed by the basically unlimited range of the *Vorgriff*.[67]

Rahner argues at length in *Spirit in the World* that his doctrine of the *Vorgriff* coheres with the epistemological and metaphysical doctrines of Thomas Aquinas.[68] Non-transcendental Thomists, of course, disagree vehemently because they think that no reflection on being that has its starting point in human conciousness ever attains real existence.[69]

The anthropological conclusion of the analysis of our dynamism toward the *Vorgriff* is that we are fundamentally spirit (*Geist*):

> To be human is to be spirit, to live life while reaching ceaselessly for the absolute, in openness toward God. . . .that we are always already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressly, whether or not we will it. We are forever the infinite openness of the finite for God.[70]

As infinite openness of the finite to God, we are open hearers of a possible revelation from God. It is in this openness that we have an obediential potency to revelation.

But why should we need to be open to revelation if we already have a grasp of God in the *Vorgriff*? Does not our knowledge of God in the *Vorgriff* make revelation redundant? In answering this challenge Rahner again stresses that he is not advocating some kind of Hegelian view of all knowledge unfolding out of our own infinity. We cannot bring the Infinite Mystery of God to disclosure in

[67] Ibid., 51.

[68] See *Spirit in the World*, 135-226 where Rahner interprets agent intellect as *excessus ad esse*.

[69] A classic traditional Thomistic critique is James P. Reichmann, "The Transcendental Method and the Psychogenesis of Being," *The Thomist* 32 (1968): 449-508. While Reichmann's critique is directed more at Emil Coreth than at Rahner, nonetheless it articulates the basic traditional complaint against any form of Transcendental Thomism: it never gets out of the head to the real.

[70] *Hearer of the Word*, 53.

knowledge by thematizing the *Vorgriff*. Human knowledge of God cannot anticipate revelation. Rahner wants to argue that our inability to anticipate revelation, and so our need to look to history for God's revelation, is not merely a contingent feature of our being but rather an *a priori* necessity. God is necessarily inacessible and unfathomable to us. Rahner's argument for this rests not on the fundamental ontological discrepancy between Infinite and finite, as in Aquinas, but rather on an analysis of God as Absolute Subject. God is essentially hidden and unknowable to us because God as Absolute Subject is *free*.

Rahner's argument for God's freedom begins with our finite experience of contingency and thrownness or situatedness in the world. As such, we are compelled to inquire into the meaning of being and in doing so we thereby adopt some kind of affirmative disposition toward our own being. It is in this activity of affirming our contingency that will is disclosed. Will is thus ingredient in all finite dynamism of the spirit and inextricably involved in all knowing: "Therefore in the ground of human existence we discover within the primordial transcendence toward being the (necessary) act of the will. The fact that being opens up for human existence is brought about by the will as an inner moment of knowledge itself."[71] In reflecting on our own contingency, however, we necessarily seek to discover the ground of our existence. Precisely because we are contingent, our ground's activity of positing us must itself be contingent; what posits the contingent cannot do so necessarily. The only cause for finite, contingent, free subjectivity can be Infinite free subjectivity. We can only understand ourselves as posited by God through a free voluntary act. In affirming ourselves as finite and contingent, we affirm ourselves as posited by God in freedom, as beings spoken by God in creation. God is thus a freely self-disposing person and so intrinsically mysterious. God remains free for further acts or words or even silence. For Rahner, God is Holy Mystery as the infinite free Subject who always, even in the beatific vision, eludes our grasp even as He beckons us in.[72]

The only possible motivation for God's free action in creating us is love:

> To start again where we left off, the finite has its ground in the free, luminous act of God. But a free, self-present act is love. For love is the luminous will willing the person in his or her own irreducible uniqueness. It is precisely such a will that God sets in action in creating a finite being. It is God's way to exercize will in free, creative power. Thus the contingent is understood in God's love and only in it: the finite contingent being becomes luminous in God's free love for self and for what God freely creates.[73]

In order to penetrate the mystery of the free Love that calls us into existence, we must enter into the act by responding in kind. The way that one comes to understand the free act of another, which remains opaque from the external point of view, is to enter into it by letting it emerge from ourselves. Thus our dynamic transcendence towards God necessarily comprises an affective dimension as well

[71] Ibid., 68.

[72] See "On the Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 36-73.

[73] *Hearer of the Word*, 81.

as an intellectual dimension. Rahner is often portrayed as something of an intellectualist because of his stress on the intellectual dynamism of finite spirit, but it is clear from *Hearer of the Word* and his other works that he has a perduring appreciation for the conative or willed element in the human dynamism towards the Absolute. The will, as well as the intellect, is constantly straining towards the infinite horizon of God in love. Just as our knowledge constantly strains past any finite object towards the Infinite, so too does our yearning outstrip any finite object. According to Rahner, the dynamisms of intellect and will are inextricably intertwined. Rahner describes love as a kind of "light" for knowledge:

> Now God's free action is luminous for us only when we do not merely take it as a fact. We must also ratify [*nachvollziehen*] it in our love for it, thus experiencing it, as it were, in its origin and its production. Thus love is the light of knowledge of the finite and since we know the infinite only through the finite, it is also the light of the whole of our knowledge. In final analysis, knowledge is but the luminous radiance of love.[74]

At the heart of finite transcendence then is love for God. It too is an *a priori* of human existence:

> This implies that our self-actualizing [*sich vollziehende*] standing before God through knowledge (which constitutes our nature as spirit) possesses, as an intrinsic element of this knowledge, a love for God: our love for God is not something which may happen or not happen, once we have come to know God. As an intrinsic element of knowledge it is both its condition and ground.[75]

Rahner does not mean to imply that knowledge is preceded by some blind drive of the will. It is rather that knowing and willing must always be understood reciprocally: "Rather knowledge and love constitute originally the one basic stance of the one human being, so that neither can ever be understood except as a turning into the other, as grasped in function of the other."[76]

The mutual interpenetration of intellect and affect in human striving means that in our concrete personal histories of striving towards the Absolute, the order of values that we freely constitute in our lives is decisive for our striving. Rahner summarizes his position:

> To be human is to be that being who stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation, to listen for God's word or God's silence to the extent that we open up in free love for this message of the word or the silence of God. We hear this possible message of the free God when we have not, on account of a wrongly directed love, narrowed the absolute horizon of our openness for being as such, when we have not, in this way, made it impossible for the word of God

[74] Ibid., 81.
[75] Ibid., 82.
[76] Ibid., 83.

to say what it might please God to say, to tell us under what guise God wishes to encounter us.[77]

Thus far the emphasis has been on human being as *Geist* and Rahner has been criticized for emphasizing this side of the human at the expense of the bodily and communal dimensions.[78] As the title of Rahner's first book indicates, however, we are not pure *Geist* but rather *Geist im Welt*. The horizon in which we open our ears to hear the Word is history. We are spirit as historical being and historicity is a fundamental mode of our being. History is the realm of freedom; it is what is constituted by the human enactment of transcendence toward the Absolute. Because, as noted earlier, we can only come to self-presence through a dialectic with matter, our self-enactment towards the Absolute is historical. We come to self-presence through receptivity and bodiliness. We need sensibility in order to know: "Sensibility is the knowledge possessed by a being which, in order to have the other as its first object, must itself be the being of matter."[79] Sensibility is for the sake of spirit. We are not just in time as some extrinsic measure of our being, but rather temporality is "the inner protracting of the thing itself in the realized totality of its possibilities."[80]

When Rahner describes the relationship between sensibility and intellect in knowledge, he stresses that knowledge has an *a posteriori* origin in the givenness of sense objects in sensibility. The intellectual dynamism that was stressed earlier must be understood to presuppose as a prior condition the receptivity of sensibility. But any recognition of being within the manifold of sensibility is a function of the illuminating power of the *Vorgriff*. It is the *Vorgriff* that makes possible, as *a priori* condition, the recognition of being in the *a posteriori*. What is given in a material way in sensibility is informed by the activity of the intellect synthesizing the manifold in the light of its apprehension of the *Vorgriff*. What appears to the knowing subject in sensibility can be seen as being only by virtue of the intellect's pre-apprehension of being in the *Vorgriff*.

Beyond the kind of negative knowledge of God that we can arrive at through metaphysical analysis, we can also come to know God through conceptual signs or words. The word spoken in history is the privileged place for finite spirit to encounter Infinite Spirit. Hence the urgent task of finite spirit in the world is to search for a possible Word from God. Rahner summarizes his position:

We may therefore summarize our whole anthropology by saying as it were by way of a definition: We are the beings of receptive spirituality, who stand in freedom before the free God of a possible revelation, which, if it comes, happens in our history through the word. We are the ones who, in our history,

[77] Ibid., 88.

[78] This is the complaint of Fergus Kerr in *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 14: "there is surely a prima facie case for suggesting that Rahner's most characteristic theological profundities are embedded in an extremely mentalist-individualist epistemology of unmistakably Cartesian provenance. Central to his whole theology, that is to say, is the possibility for the individual to occupy a standpoint beyond his immersion in the bodily, the historical and the institutional."

[79] *Hearer of the Word*, 103.

[80] Ibid., 110.

> listen for the word of the free God. Only thus are we what we should be. A metaphysical anthropology has reached its end when it has understood itself as the metaphysics of an obediential potency for the revelation of the supramundane God.[81]

The centrality of anthropology in Rahner's thinking is illustrated in the conclusion to *Hearer of the Word* when he makes the following series of identifications: philosophy of religion is fundamental theological anthropology and natural theology and metaphysical anthropology and metaphysics! A transcendental anaysis of the human subject opens the door to all these domains of knowledge because they are variations on a single theme: the human spirit as dynamism towards Absolute Being. It should be obvious by now what a close correlation there is between Rahner's anthropology and Christianity. Anthropology points to history for a word from God presupposing that the most transparent word is the human being as the place where Spirit appears most fully in the world. Philosophy for Rahner is thus proto-Christian:

> Correctly understood, philosophy is always an expectation, a preparation for the Gospel. In this sense it is Christian by itself, not in the sense of some subsequent baptism, but by the fact that it sets up someone who can hear God's message, insofar as such a power of hearing derives from human nature.[82]

How Rahner uses this proto-Christian anthropology to handle the question of non-Christian religions will be studied in another chapter. How he used it as one of the foundational premises in his enormously impressive and influential theology must be studied in another book.[83] What is to be concluded here is that his anthropology represents the most ambitious attempt to re-think and re-interpret Roman Catholic and Thomistic anthropology in the twentieth century.

[81] Ibid., 142.

[82] Ibid., 153.

[83] Rahner's own mature presentation of his transcendental theology is *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych, S.J. (New York: Seabury, 1978). Dych authored a short overview of Rahner's theology in the Liturgical Press's Outstanding Christian Thinkers series as *Karl Rahner* (Collegeville, MN: 1992). For more on Rahner's anthropology, see Andrew Tallon, *Personal Becoming. Karl Rahner's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982). A nice collection of Rahner's writings is in *A Rahner Reader*, ed. Gerald A. McCool (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

# 8. Conception of the Absolute

As noted in the discussion of religious language in Chapter Three, Aquinas inherited from Pseudo-Dionysius a conception that the path to God must be threefold and that its logic is best understood according to the order of (1) the way of causality (*via causalitatis*), (2) the way of negation (*via negativa*), and (3) the way of eminence (*via eminentiae*).[1] In exploring the Thomistic conception of the Absolute, it is therefore best to follow that order. The first part of the chapter will explore Aquinas's causal approach to God and its link to his central doctrine of creation. Once God is accorded metaphysical primacy as First Cause and Creator, then the immediate conclusions to be drawn are along the *via negativa*. God as First Cause must be utterly unlike everything else and transcend all the features of the world that bespeak metaphysical limitation or imperfection. So the affirmation of the *via causalitatis* leads immediately to the negation of anything that is incompatible with God as First Cause and Pure Act; the *via negativa* logically presupposes the minimal positive knowledge acquired by the *via causalitatis*. The second section of the chapter will explore the *via negativa* through a discussion of divine simplicity, immutability, eternity, and infinity. It will be shown that what look *prima facie* like positive predications about God or a discussion of divine attributes are really negative claims. In other words, they tell us what God is not rather than what God is. Despite the stress on the *via negativa*, however, Aquinas allows that we can attribute some positive perfections to God in a super-eminent fashion and the third section of this chapter will explore those claims through a discussion of God's goodness, knowledge, and will.

## I. GOD THE FIRST CAUSE AND CREATOR

With the notable exception of the Transcendental Thomist tradition, which will be considered elsewhere[2], Thomists have generally followed Aquinas in opting for an a posteriori (effect to cause) approach to establishing the existence of God. In his own historical context, Aquinas's procedure represented a conscious option against a more broadly Augustinian approach favored by the Franciscan tradition.[3]

[1] The reader should refer to that earlier discussion as necessary background.

[2] See the discussion of Rahner in the previous chapter.

[3] See Jean Châtillon, "De Guillaume d'Auxerre à saint Thomas d'Aquin: L'argument de saint Anselme chez les premiers scolastiques du XIII[e] siècle," in *D'Isadore de Séville à saint Thomas*

As Aquinas understood that tradition, its basic claim was that the existence of God did not need to be established by cosmological argumentation because rational reflection ought to lead the mind to recognize the proposition "God is" as self-evidently true or *per se nota*.[4] Central to this claim was an appropriation of the Anselmian argument based on the definition of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived"; if one reflects on God thus conceived, then God cannot be thought not to exist. Aquinas's basic argument against this position is that its claims regarding self-evidence do not cohere with the cognitive capacities of the human intellect. Aquinas would agree that in itself (*secundum se*) "God is" is analytically true because God's very nature is identical with his existence. Yet that truth is not directly accessible to the human intellect because (as noted in Chapter Two) we cannot have quidditative knowledge of God's essence. To us (*quoad nos*), the identity in God of essence and existence remains opaque. As we will see in the discussion of divine simplicity, the assertion that essence and existence are identical in God is really a negative claim rather than one based upon knowledge of the divine essence. In addition to Aquinas's general disagreement with any approach that presupposes the capacity to grasp the divine essence, he has at least two specific criticisms of the prevailing versions of the Anselmian argument. First and foremost, Aquinas does not think that it is ever possible to move from an intellectual consideration of a word's definition to a positive assertion of the extra-mental existence of its referent; existence claims are based instead on direct experience or causal argumentation. Second, Aquinas thinks that the limitations of the human mind mean that we cannot confidently claim to be able to think of something "than which nothing greater can be conceived." Aquinas notes that the Anselmian argument poses no problem for someone who holds that for anything given in reality or thought a greater *can* be conceived; in other words, it is possible to defuse Anselm's argument by saying that we cannot conceive a "greater than which nothing can be conceived" because for any concept of a perfect being we might have, a greater could always be thought.[5]

According to the canons of Aristotelian science accepted by Aquinas, it is possible to mount a probative a posteriori argument from an effect to knowledge of the proper cause of that effect through what is called a demonstration of the fact (*quia*), as opposed to a stronger form of argument that moves from cause to effect (demonstration *propter quid*).[6] Since such an approach cannot presuppose any genuine knowledge of the nature of the cause before its existence is established, it instead stipulates a nominal definition of the cause based on the effect. In the case of God, we stipulate a nominal definition or metaphysical description based on the fundamental assumption that God the creator is the ultimate cause of the world. We assume, for example, that God is the First Unmoved Mover, prove that a First Unmoved Mover exists, and then assert that God exists under the description of (*qua*) First Unmoved Mover. In this kind of an argument, the nominal definition functions as the middle term of the syllogism. This kind of argument does not tell

*d'Aquin* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 209-231. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 391-399.

[4] See SCG I, 12 and ST I, 2, 2.

[5] See Gareth B. Matthews, "Aquinas on Saying God Doesn't Exist," *The Monist* 47 (1963): 472-477.

[6] ST I, 2, 2.

us what God is in Himself, but rather that God exists under a certain causal description. It is important to note that because Aquinas's various arguments for the existence of God conclude to God under formally distinct metaphysical descriptions, more work needs to be done in order to show how the initial metaphysical descriptions are unified in a unique referent. There is also the problem of showing how the metaphysical attributes include the other attributes, and especially the personifying features, traditionally ascribed to God.[7]

Aquinas is most famous for the five causal arguments in *Summa theologiae* I, 2, 3.[8] Yet while these five arguments have received the lion's share of scholarly attention, it is important to note that they do not exhaust the Thomistic repertoire.[9] There are different versions of these arguments in other works of Aquinas, often with stronger and more elaborate formulations.[10] More importantly, there are also different arguments that some Thomists consider to be superior to any found in the *Summa theologiae*. For example, there is an argument in Chapter Four of the *De ente et essentia*, based on the real distinction within created being of *esse* ("to be") and *essentia* and arguing to God as *causa esse*, that Etienne Gilson considered to be the most profound and direct of all of Aquinas's arguments.[11] More recently, Norman Kretzmann has argued that in the context of a discussion of divine eternity in *Summa contra gentiles* I, 15, Aquinas constructs an argument based on contingency that is different from and superior to what is found in the Third Way.[12] The variety of arguments in the texts of Aquinas means that it would be wrong to consider the famous Five Ways of the *Summa theologiae* as if they were the only arguments for the existence of God or even the best ones at the disposal of the Thomist. Since Aquinas typically presents several arguments together, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he believed the case for God's existence is more effectively made in a cumulative approach rather than by relying on one form of argument alone.

When it comes to the five arguments of *Summa theologiae* I, 2, 3, Thomists have argued vehemently amongst themselves in the twentieth century about such matters as the historical influences on Aquinas's arguments, their relative originality, their proper interpretation, their probative merit, and their contemporary viability.[13] These debates are ongoing and cannot be reviewed here; the five ways have spawned a veritable scholarly cottage industry and each has had

[7] This point is made by Fernand Van Steenburghen in *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Éditions de L'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1980), 287 ff.. Van Steenburghen's book is an indispensable guide to the various arguments of Aquinas and the classic discussions of them by Thomists. More recently, Norman Kretzmann's *The Metaphysics of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) makes the same point about the gap between God as First Cause and God as a personal being (113).

[8] A helpful guide to English treatments of these arguments is Lubor Velecky, *Aquinas' Five Arguments in the* Summa theologiae 1a 2, 3.

[9] Van Steenburghen's *Le problème* gives a chronological analysis of all of Aquinas's arguments. See also Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 400-441.

[10] For example, the proof from motion is given much greater attention in SCG I, 13.

[11] "*La preuve de* De ente et essentia," *Acta III Congressus Thomistici Internationalis. Doctor Communis* 3 (1950): 257-260.

[12] *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 95-112.

[13] As I argued in Chapter Two, Thomists have not often seen clearly what role the proofs play in Aquinas's thought.

its champions and detractors.[14] In addition to intra-mural debate, Thomists have engaged in vigorous extra-mural debates with critics who have questioned the contemporary viability of the arguments.[15] In the face of contemporary criticism, some Thomists have offered modified versions[16] or innovative approaches based on Thomistic principles.[17] In the light of the volume and complexity of the scholarly debates surrounding the five arguments, what is offered here is but an outline of each with some indications of where the points of contention are.

Aquinas's five arguments for the existence of God follow a similar pattern. Because they are effect-to-cause arguments, they begin with an analysis of some feature of the world of experience that turns out to require the postulation of some higher-order cause in order to account for it; in other words, the phenomenon chosen as the starting point displays features that reveal it must be the effect of some cause. The first argument takes its point of departure from one of the most obvious features of the sensible world: things are in motion. While there is some debate about the exact meaning of "motion" in the argument, since the term *motus* could be used widely to cover any kind of change or restrictively to refer only to changes in quality, quantity, or place,[18] in this context it is enough simply to take motion to mean any change in a sensible being wherein it moves from potentially being *x* to actually being *x* (or vice-versa), and where that change is a real change in the being rather than some relational change or "Cambridge" change. Whatever the case of motion, what is most important is that whenever something is in motion, the source of that motion must be sought in some other being: whatever is moved is moved by another.[19] The reason given here is based on the nature of act and potency. Something that is being moved is in the process of becoming actually what it was only potentially prior to the motion. For example, a piece of wood is only potentially hot before it becomes actually hot under the causal influence of fire. In order to explain how something that is only potentially *x* becomes actually *x*, it is necessary to invoke something else that either actually is *x* or that has the active causal capacity to produce *x* in another. It is not possible for some being to be both potentially *x* and actually *x* at the same time and in the same respect; hence whatever is being moved from potentiality to actuality cannot be moving itself. So whatever is moved is moved by another. Motion is an effect requiring a cause.

The next stage of the argument is to investigate the nature of the cause of motion in order to ascertain whether it is a moved mover or an unmoved mover. If the cause of the original motion-effect is not self-explanatory, but rather itself requires a cause in order to explain its own exercise of causality, then the causal

[14] See Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 442-500 for a reliable overview and guide to the secondary literature on the five ways.

[15] The most notorious critic, though not necessarily the most penetrating, has been Anthony Kenny in *The Five Ways* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

[16] W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The Philosophical Approach to God: A Neothomist Perspective* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 1979).

[17] David Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[18] See David Twetten, "Clearing a 'Way' for Aquinas: How the Proof from Motion Concludes to God" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Supplement 70 (1996): 259-278.

[19] For a discussion of whether this medieval principle is still viable in the face of contemporary science, see Chapter Four, pp. 76–78.

analysis moves to the next level of causality in order to pose the same question. It is a fundamental premise of Aquinas's argument that there cannot be an infinite series of caused causes or moved movers. The infinite series of causes at issue here is not like that of a *kalam*-style argument wherein it is denied that there can be a diachronically infinite series (thus requiring that God be First Cause in a temporal sense). Aquinas's arguments require that God be the First Cause of the universe *now*, not at some distant time in the past; indeed, his arguments have no relevance at all as to whether the world had a temporal beginning. What is denied instead is that there can be an infinite series of essentially ordered causes where each cause depends upon another for its ability to function as a cause.[20] What we are looking at here is an essentially subordinated (*per se*) series of origins of change, each one itself undergoing change precisely so as to be a cause of change. Such a series cannot go on to infinity because secondary origins of change do not themselves originate change expect insofar as they are dependent upon something primary; if all the causes in the series were caused causes, then there would be no causing at all because moved movers do not move unless there is something moving them. If *per impossibile* all the causes were only moved movers, then there would be no motion at all. But there is motion. Therefore there must be a First Unmoved Mover that is the ultimate explanation for all motion, and this is identified with God. It is vital here that "First" be carefully understood. The argument is not talking about a mover that is chronologically first or first among equals – God is not like a cause that pushes the first domino leading all the other dominoes to fall. The argument is rather talking about a hierarchical causal order in which what is primary transcends the other causes and is the ultimate cause of *all* the causing and so of the effect.

The second argument is quite similar to the first. Its starting point is the phenomenon of ordered efficient causes. We see things efficiently causing other things in dependence upon prior causes. It is impossible for something to be the efficient cause of itself, since that would imply that it would be prior to itself; something cannot bring itself into being because it has first to *be* in order to be a cause. So any instance of efficient causality requires a cause distinct from the effect. By hypothesis here, the proximate cause of the effect is a member of an ordered series of causes and so is a caused cause. Any essentially ordered series of efficient causes cannot comprise only caused causers for the same reason noted in the first argument: there can only be caused causes when there is an uncaused cause. Without an uncaused cause, all the other causes are impotent. But there are ordered efficient causes in the world. Hence there must be a First Efficient Cause of the order that is identified with God.

The third way is based upon the distinction between the possible and the necessary. It is evident that there are possible beings in the world in the sense that they come into being and go out of being. Possible beings are inherently contingent

[20] A well known article on this is Patterson Brown, "Infinite Causal Regression," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A Kenny (Anchor: Garden City, NY, 1969), 214-236. While Brown does a good job of explaining what an essential order of causes is, and so why the explanandum is not a lump set of items, he is wrong in supposing that what is at issue in the impossibility of an infinite regress is the question of a scientific explanation. An infinite series of caused causes is not a problem because it violates the principle of sufficient reason, but rather because it entails the absurd conclusion that there is no motion.

because they are matter-form composites; whatever is composed of matter has an intrinsic and inevitable principle of corruption. Aquinas argues that it is impossible that everything be corruptible. The reason he gives is that if everything were possible, then at some past time everything would have corrupted and so nothing would exist now (since from nothing nothing comes). But the world does exist now, so there must be something necessary or non-corruptible. Aquinas's claim that all possible beings would have gone out of existence in the past if there were not something necessary has been disputed on many grounds. On the face of it, it seems to commit the fallacy of composition (asserting that something is true of all the members of the set because it is true of each) or a fallacious quantifier shift (each to all).[21] Hence many commentators, even committed Thomists, think this argument stops dead in its tracks here. But Aquinas goes on to argue that supposing there must be necessary beings, we can then analyze the necessary beings in order to determine whether their necessity is caused or not. To be necessary is not *ipso facto* to be uncaused, but only incorruptible. Some beings, like angels and heavenly bodies, are caused necessary beings. Yet these kinds of beings ultimately cannot account for themselves because there cannot be an infinite series of caused necessary beings. Hence there must be a necessary being that has its necessity through itself and causes the necessary being of others; this is God.

The fourth argument is based on the varying degrees of perfections like goodness, truth, and nobility that we see in the world around us. The background metaphysical assumptions here are more Neoplatonic than Aristotelian. Our ability to commensurate perfections according to more or less presupposes the existence of a maximum as the standard for commensuration. Hence there must be something that is maximally good, true, and noble; and since these are transcendental perfections, found wherever being is, there must be something that is maximally or perfectly being. As many commentators have pointed out, however, this seems to be a weak argument. Is it not possible to perceive greater or lesser without postulating a maximum? And even if a maximum must be thought in order to judge between greater or lesser, that does not mean that the maximum must exist. In order to make the argument work, it seems necessary to import metaphysical assumptions (about participation, for example) that are not explicitly stated in the argument and to which the argument may not be entitled anyway. Aquinas goes on, however, to argue that the maximum in any degree of perfection must be the cause of all the lesser instances. Hence there must be a maximally perfect being that is the cause of all perfections and all being; this is God.

The fifth way is rooted in natural teleology and final causality. We observe that natures lacking intelligence nevertheless act for the sake of an end. To say that they act for the sake of an end is to say that every nature acts so as to become a fully completed or perfected instance of its kind. Things naturally act in ways that conduce to their flourishing. And even though not every individual achieves its end, nevertheless its activities are ordered to it as a future state to be achieved. Aquinas argues that natural finality can only be explained by a mind overarching all of nature and implanting in each nature its end-directedness. He explicitly considers chance as an alternative explanation, but rejects it because it cannot

[21] See Kenny, *The Five Ways*, 46-69.

account for regularity in nature. Because chance refers to the intersection of two independent lines of causality to produce an outcome that would not come from either alone, it is not a genuinely causal explanation. Aquinas would reject also any materialist explanation for natural teleology, since all natural action requires substantial form and form is what determines the end. It is important to note that an argument from natural finality is not equivalent to a modern teleological or design argument. Aquinas is not arguing on the basis of the parts of nature being fitted together as a whole or evolving into a whole, but rather on the basis of natural things achieving their own ends as instances of their kinds rather than as parts of some greater whole. Obviously, then, the cogency of this argument depends upon the larger defense of teleology in nature against the modern tendency to eliminate final causality. If there is final causality, however, then there must be a mind to explain it. This we call God.

While not all Thomists agree that all the above arguments are cogent or compelling, all would agree that it is possible to mount a posteriori arguments for the existence of God. The most-defended arguments are the first and the second (motion and efficient causality). But even supposing that they have validly obtained their conclusions, it is important to note that the establishment of the existence of God as First Cause of the world is not the same thing as establishing that God is the Creator of the world; the former does not necessarily entail the latter, although some Thomists have advanced interpretations of the God arguments that arrive at a God who is close to a Creator.[22] Aquinas himself always kept these two questions formally distinct.[23] The reason for this is that creation formally involves the absolute origination of the whole of being. To say then that God is the Creator is to describe God as the cause of the very being of everything that is, as opposed to the more limited descriptions under which God is invoked in standard interpretations of the arguments for God's existence. When Aquinas offers arguments purporting to prove that the world is created by God, he explicitly presupposes the larger metaphysical picture wherein God is conceived as *ipsum esse subsistens*, the very act of to-be itself, and where all other beings are only finite participations in *esse* through their essences. In other words, in order to move from God's existence to God as Creator, much more metaphysical stage-setting needs to be presupposed.

As the absolute origination of being, creation is *ex nihilo* in the sense that there is no pre-existing raw material; there is no whence or origin of creation apart from God.[24] Creation is a *sui generis* kind of activity insofar as it presupposes no prior subject or background. Creation does not describe a temporal or historical event, but rather a relationship of absolute metaphysical dependence upon God; the very being of a creature is its being related to God as the ongoing source of its being.[25]

[22] See Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God. The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980). By interpreting the starting points of all the arguments in terms of existence, Owens infers that they all conclude to a First Cause of existence. Many Thomists would argue, however, that Owens's approach reads existence into arguments where it does not belong; this would be my view.

[23] This is clear from the structure of both of his great *Summae*, where creation is treated after arguments establishing God's existence and nature have been developed.

[24] See Kenneth Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982).

[25] See James F. Anderson, "Creation as a Relation," *New Scholasticism* 24 (1950): 263-283.

Like arguments for the existence of God, arguments for God as Creator do not entail any conclusions regarding whether or not the history of the universe stretches back infinitely in the past; the Christian claim that there is a definite first moment of time is based on revelation and cannot be proved demonstratively by reason.[26]

The created world remains absolutely dependent for its existence upon God throughout its temporal duration. The metaphysical dependence of creation upon the creator is permanent; so long as any being exists, it depends absolutely and immediately upon God as the unique causal source of its being. God is not just the cause of creatures coming into existence (*causa fieri*) but also of their remaining in existence (*causa essendi*). This activity of God whereby creatures are maintained in existence as their *causa esse* is called conservation.[27] Aquinas believes that creation and conservation do not denote two distinct acts by God, but rather one and the same act conceived differently by us. What both terms denote is that God as *esse per se subsistens* is the unique, direct, immediate, and unconditional efficient cause of all creaturely existence; just as in creating *ex nihilo* God does not causally presuppose anything, so in conserving existence God does not presuppose anything (i.e. the previous existence of the being in question).[28] What distinguishes creation from conservation is purely conceptual: creation denotes the metaphysical dependence from the perspective of the inception of existence,[29] while conservation denotes the dependence in terms of the continuation of existence.[30] When Aquinas says that conservation is a continuation of creation, this does not mean that the action has some kind of temporal extension, as if God performed a continuous series of creative acts simultaneous with each moment of time.[31] Although to us conservation seems to be temporally extended, there is really only one eternal originative act whereby God bestows being upon the world.

The creative activity of God as the unique *causa esse* entails God's radical immanence to all of creation:

> So long as a thing has *esse*, it is necessary that God be present to it according to the mode whereby it has *esse*. For *esse* is what is most intimate to anything and

[26] See J. B. M. Wissink, ed., *The Eternity of the World in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas and his Contemporaries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).

[27] See ST I, 104, 1; SCG III, 65; and DP 5, 1. A good brief account of what Aquinas means by calling God *causa esse* is T.C. O'Brien, "*Esse*, the Proper Effect of God Alone," in *Summa theologiae*, Volume 17: *Divine Government* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 169-175.

[28] "Of course, if God upholds a thing in existence, the previous existence of the thing is logically presupposed, but not causally, since in His action He in no way uses this previous existence and in no way relies or depends upon it as something internal to his action. The difference between creation and upholding is precisely this, that in creation what is created comes into existence from nothing, while in upholding, what is upheld is something existing before, which is being given continuance in existence. But that what already exists should be the 'object' with respect to which God's action is specified in no way makes it an efficient causal precondition of this action and in no way compromises the immediacy of His action and presence." Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God*, 179.

[29] ST I, 45, 3 ad 3.

[30] ST I, 104, 1 ad 4.

[31] For a critique of this view, which John C. Yates calls a "strong *creatio continua*" doctrine and rightfully distinguishes from Aquinas's doctrine, see *The Timelessness of God* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 152ff.

> what is most basic because it is formal with respect to everything else that is in something (as noted above). Hence it is necessary that God is present to all things and in an intimate manner.[32]

God's causal presence to all creatures extends to their causal activities as well as their substantial being. God is the cause of causing, including human knowing and willing.[33] In order to account for this causal immanence, however, God cannot be a being like any other being. God must instead transcend all of the limitations inherent in what it means to be created. As we shall see, the main point of the *via negativa* is to safeguard divine transcendence by denying that God has any of the limiting features of created being.

## II. THE *VIA NEGATIVA*: SAYING WHAT GOD IS NOT

Once God is accorded metaphysical primacy as ultimate actuality, then the immediate conclusions to be drawn are along the *via negativa*. The affirmation of the *via causalitatis* leads immediately to the negation of anything that is incompatible with God as First Cause. As noted in the earlier discussion of religious knowledge, negative judgments about God are made on the basis of prior positive claims about God's metaphysical primacy. It must be recalled here also that Aquinas typically prefaces his discussion of the divine attributes by describing it as an exercise in saying what God is *not* rather than in saying what God is.[34] Much of what looks *prima facie* like positive predications of God are really negative. In this section I want to discuss divine simplicity, immutability, eternity, and infinity as disguised negative claims about God rather than as positive attributes.

### *A. Divine Simplicity*

Nicholas Wolterstorff has argued persuasively that much of the contemporary critique of the doctrine of divine simplicity is powered by a clash of ontological styles.[35] Wolterstorff categorizes Aquinas's medieval style as *constituent ontology* and contrasts it with the contemporary *relation ontology*. The force of the contrast is to bring out the difference between (1) thinking about beings in terms of their constituent parts – as concrete subjects having essences, properties, and accidents – and (2) thinking about beings as related to abstract properties through exemplification. Once the contrast between ontologies is understood, then it can be seen that the doctrine of divine simplicity essentially amounts to the claim that God has no constituent ontological parts. There is no internal differentiation in God between essence or nature and properties, activities, and accidents; most importantly, there is no distinction between God's essence and God's *esse*, between what makes God be *God* and what makes God *be*. None of the compositive and constitutive features of created being are found within God. As Brian Davies has put it: "He [God] is divinity through and through without parts or

[32] ST I, 8, 1. The reference in the text is to the important discussion in 4, 1 ad 3 of *esse* as the foundational act of every being and so more metaphysically basic than form or essence.

[33] ST I, 105.

[34] See the prologue to question 3 in ST and SCG I, 14.

[35] "Divine Simplicity," in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5(1991): 531–532.

aspects. . . everything that God is *is* God."[36] Because God is not composed of any internal parts, God is therefore not classifiable by any of the conceptual equipment that we use to identify and sort created beings. God cannot be like any of those items in the world of which He is the Creator, but must rather exist in a completely transcendent manner. David Burrell thus argues that what he calls divine simpleness is vital in securing the distinction of God the Creator from creation. Burrell calls simpleness a *formal feature*, something different from an attribute or characteristic, since it belongs to our manner of characterizing the subject prior to the ascription of attributes as such.[37] The doctrine is not meant to tell us something about God's properties, but rather is meant to deny that God has properties in the normal sense of that term. What makes God wise, powerful, etc. is the very same reality that makes God be God. Simplicity governs our entire manner of speaking of God, constantly reminding us that our necessarily complex discourse about God is not isomorphic with God's being; simplicity asserts that sentences with different meanings latch on to the same reality in God.

The fundamental reason why Aquinas denies that there is composition in God is that he thinks that composition entails potency. If a being is a composite and a unity, then that can only be explained by some part functioning as causally unifying act with respect to the other parts which are potential to being unified in a whole.[38] Because God as First Cause cannot have any potency but must instead be Pure Act, God cannot have any internal composition. The logic of Aquinas's treatment of divine simplicity then is simply a matter of explicitating how the general principle that composition entails potency results in the need to deny that any form of creaturely complex internal composition can be found in God.[39] For purposes of this exposition, I want to focus on three resulting claims: the identity of God with his essence, the identity of God's essence with God's existence, and the identity of God with his attributes.

In material substances, the kinds of beings that we are most familiar with, the constitutive components are the substantial form, which makes the being be what it is or explains why it is this *kind* of a being; matter, which individuates it; and accidental forms which modify the substance. No material individual subject is identifiable with any one of these constituent parts but is rather a composite unity of the parts. God cannot have any matter, since matter is a principle of potentiality. Nor can God have distinct accidents, since that would require that his essence be in potency to the accidents. In God there is no distinction between what makes God be God (the divine essence) and what makes God be the individual subsisting subject that God is. Indeed, as Brian Davies has argued, this means that it is perhaps better to say that God is not an individual in the normal sense of the term because God is not an individual member of a class sharing a common nature; God

[36] "Classical Theism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," in *Language, Meaning and God*, ed. Brian Davies (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 51.

[37] "Distinguishing God from the World," in *Language, Meaning and God*, 75-91.

[38] SCG I, 18.

[39] The doctrine of the Trinity poses a special and complex problem: How is it that three really distinct persons in one nature does not violate divine simplicity? This is a theological problem too complicated for treatment in this context.

is rather individuated by his very nature.[40] But the same thing could also be said of angels within Aquinas's metaphysics, so it is necessary to dig deeper to discern what disinguishes the divine being from every other being.

The principle feature distinguishing God from every other being is that God's essence is not distinct from God's *esse*. The main argument for the identity of essence and *esse* in God is a *reductio ad absurdum*.[41] Suppose that the two principles were distinct constituents of God's being, how then would they be related? Aquinas argues that the only viable explanatory options would be to say either that the essence caused its own *esse,* or that the essence received its *esse* from an extrinsic causal source. The former option is not viable because an essence cannot cause its own existence; in order for something to act as a cause, it must first *be*. Since *esse* is the pre-condition for any exercise of causality by an essence, the latter cannot cause the former; God cannot be *causa sui*. But neither can God's essence receive its *esse* from an extrinsic causal source because then God would no longer be the First Cause; to receive *esse* from another is to be caused or contingent in being. When *esse* is causally received by some essence, then that essence is a potentiality for existing which it receives as actuality. So if God's essence were distinct from God's *esse*, then the former would be potency to the latter as act; but there cannot be any potency in God, so God's essence cannot be distinct from God's *esse*. These same principles can be recast within Aquinas's participation metaphysics wherein for an essence to receive *esse* from another is for it to exist only through participation in that other as cause; since God cannot be caused or exist through another, God's existence must be through his self-identical essence. Another way of putting this is to say that God has no potentiality for existing but rather God's very nature is *to-be*.

The identity of essence and existence in God is what secures God's transcendence as Creator from everything else that is. The very nature or essence of God the Creator is the act of to-be in all its plenitude. In every other being, the created state requires that essence is distinct from and in potency to the *esse* that is received from God. Every creature exists through participation in God, while God exists through his own essence. The unique identity in God of *esse* and essence means that the distinction between Creator and creature is not a matter of degree, as if God and creatures could be measured on a scale wherein God would be the most, best, highest, or most powerful being. It is rather the case that the identity in God of essence and *esse* means that God is radically other than creation and incommensurable with creatures. Aquinas is careful to note that when we assert the identity of *esse* and essence in God we do not make any claims to understand what that is like. We know that it is true that in God there must be identity of essence and *esse*, but in asserting the truth of that claim we have no insight into what makes it true because the divine essence remains beyond our grasp.[42]

The third major claim ingredient in the doctrine of divine simplicity is that there is no distinction in God between the reality that makes God be God and the reality that makes God be what we understand as good, intelligent, loving, etc..

[40] Davies, 61ff.
[41] SCG I, 22 and ST I, 3, 4.
[42] ST I, 3, 4 ad 2. See the discussion of this passage on pp. 54–55.

Traditionally such terms are said to denote God's "attributes" or "properties" and these are said to be identical with God. Yet the doctrine of divine simplicity is better understood as tantamount to a denial that God has attributes or properties in the normal senses of those words. In material beings, properties and capacities for action are distinct from the substantial form; in this context, attributes and activities require some distinct ontological principle beside the nature or essence. In God, however, what makes God good, wise, loving, etc. is nothing other than what makes God be God; there is no other constitutive principle besides the divine essence that is needed to ground our claims about God's attributes or activities. This does not mean that what we understand by the terms we use when we ascribe different properties or attributes to God are all synonymous; it is rather to say that what we understand distinctly by all such terms refer to the very self-same divine essence. As Davies puts it:

> Defenders of the doctrine [of divine simplicity] do not deny that, for example, "God is wise" means something different from "God is powerful." In this sense they can be said to accept that God has different properties. What they deny is that what is signified by "the wisdom of God" is possessed by God as a property distinct from that of being powerful. They also deny that "the wisdom of God" and "the power of God" refer to something other than what is signified by means of the word "God."[43]

*B. Divine Infinity*

Divine infinity follows quite closely upon divine simplicity. For if God's *esse* is not received in and composed with a distinct essence, then it follows that God's *esse* subsists in unlimited actuality and perfection.[44] Aquinas's argument presupposes the metaphysical axiom that unreceived act is unlimited and its corollary that limited instances of act or perfection must be accounted for by an appeal to a principle that receives and limits.[45] Like the identity of essence and *esse* that is its source, infinity of *esse* is a unique feature of God that sets God transcendently apart from every creature[46]; to be a creature is precisely to be finite, to have *esse* in a composed and finite manner through a distinct essence. Creatures may have a qualified infinity, either privatively (e.g. the indeterminacy of matter) or positively (e.g. the unrestricted actuality of form in angels), but they cannot be infinite in their *esse*.[47]

[43] Davies, 58.

[44] ST I, 7, 1.

[45] See John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act is Unlimited," *Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998): 533-564.

[46] ST I, 7, 1 ad 2: "From the very fact that God's *esse* subsists *per se* and not as received in another, it is accordingly said to be infinite, distinguished from everything else, and all other beings are removed from it."

[47] ST I, 7, 2.

Within the contemporary context, the Thomistic conception of divine infinity has been challenged by an alternative view within Process theology.[48] The dipolar God of process theism is both finite and infinite: finite in the actuality of God's determinate being but infinite in God's intellectual and creative prehending of all the possible realizations of being. From the Thomistic point of view, the Process conception of divine infinity is objectionable because it makes God only *potentially* infinite rather than actually infinite. William Hill has categorized the differences between the two:

> For Aquinas, God is the ultimately real to which nothing is prior ontologically or logically. For Whitehead, God and the world are correlates; each is an actual entity subordinate to what lies beyond them both, namely creativity as the category of the ultimate. Only actual entities are fully real, but they are such as instantiations of creativity that is itself devoid of all actuality. In Aquinas's system, entities of the finite world are grounded in something that is at once fully actual and unlimited (with the consequence that God alone is the source of creation). In Whitehead's differing vision, actual entities are grounded in something that is nowise actual even if unlimited. The former is subsistent *esse*; the latter is pure process called creativity.[49]

Another way of putting the contrast between Thomistic and Process thought on divine infinity is to say that Thomism argues that all created possibility must be grounded in and derived from the uncreated infinite actuality that is God's own being, while Process thought grounds finite instantiations in an infinite that is ultimately non-divine, non-actual, and an eternal, uncreated correlate to God. In Thomistic terms, Process thought privileges the possible over the actual in such a way as to make it appear that the two conceptions of divine infinity are mutually incompatible.

*C. Divine Immutability*[50]

Divine immutability follows logically from the preceding claims about God as First Cause, simple, and infinite.[51] As the First Cause of the World, God must be pure act. But for something to change, it must be in potency. Ergo God cannot change. A second argument is that change requires some internal composition; a being that changes must comprise both a potential element and an abiding or continuous subject of change. But God is simple. Hence God cannot change. A third argument is that whenever something changes, it either acquires some feature that it did not have before or it loses a feature that it previously had. As the infinite

[48] On the relationship between Thomistic and Process senses of infinity, see William J. Hill, "In What Sense is God Infinite? A Thomistic Perspective," in his *Search for the Absent God* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 120-127. My characterization here is dependent upon Hill.

[49] Ibid., 123.

[50] The best discussion is Michael J. Dodds, O.P., *The Unchanging God of Love: A Study of the Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on Divine Immutability in View of Certain Contemporary Criticisms of this Doctrine* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires, 1986).

[51] ST I, 9, 1.

plenitude of *esse*, God cannot acquire some perfection that was previously lacking or lose something of his perfection.

The Thomistic account of divine immutability has been roundly criticized by Process thinkers and theologians committed to a stronger involvement of God in history. Thomistic immutability allegedly results in a philosophical God who is too abstract, static, uncaring, and impersonal to be employed credibly within theology. In response to such criticisms, some Thomists have argued that these critiques misrepresent the Thomistic view, and that a proper understanding reveals that divine immutability is perfectly coherent with theological claims about God's loving involvement with the world.[52] At least two prominent Thomists, however, have argued that some modification of the doctrine is required to account for genuine relationality between God and the World. In "A New Look at the Immutability of God,"[53] W. Norris Clarke argues that while it is necessary to affirm that God's intrinsic real being is not subject to change and cannot be affected by creation, nonetheless God is truly related to the world of creation by an intentional relation of personal consciousness. The key premise in Clarke's position is a distinction between God's real being, what is true of the divine nature, and God's intentional being, what is true of God by virtue of God's knowing and willing of what is other than God. Clarke argues that any Thomist must admit "that the divine consciousness, in its intentional content, is *distinctly, determinately,* and *contingently differentiated* or *other* with respect to creatures because God has freely chosen this world, than it would and could have been had he chosen a different world or none at all."[54] Clarke thinks that a proper appreciation of God's personal-intentional relationship to us should be enough to satisfy the religious demands for a God who is really related to us. Clarke maintains that God's intentional relationship to the world does not introduce any real change or temporal sequence within divine consciousness, but he does hold that there is some kind of internal correlate to time within the divine consciousness.

With more explicitly theological concerns in mind, William Hill has taken up the thread of Clarke's position and argued for a distinction between God in his nature, which is immutable, and God in his personhood, which reflects God's being in his freely chosen self-relation to others.[55] Like Clarke, Hill argues that God's freely chosen relationship to human beings does not render God patient to creaturely causality, but that nonetheless being related to creatures does "determine" God in the sense that "such relationality is in part defined by the 'other' to which it relates."[56] As a theologian, Hill goes beyond Clarke in grappling with the question of whether or not divine love requires that God suffer. Hill argues that *pathos* is not a necessary component of love as such, but rather only of finite love; in God, love is essentially an affective union and a consequent willing the good for the sake of the other. God's omnipotent love does not require that God be a co-sufferer with us, but rather that God redeem us. Yet while God need not necessarily suffer with us in order to love us, faith tells us that God does freely

[52] This is Dodds's approach in *The Unchanging God of Love*.
[53] *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 183-210.
[54] Ibid., 194.
[55] "Does the World Make a Difference to God?" in *Search for the Absent God*, 110-119.
[56] Ibid., 118.

choose in love to share our suffering in the humanity of Jesus. So while divine immutability entails that God cannot suffer within his divinity, God truly does suffer in and through the humanity God has made one with himself in Jesus.[57] Ultimately, the religious demands that incline one to want to posit passibility within God are answered not by altering the doctrine of divine immutability, but rather by properly understanding the doctrine of the Incarnation.

*D. Divine Eternity*[58]

Aquinas understands divine eternity to mean that God is beyond time (timeless or time-free) rather than everlasting or existing at all times. Eternity in this sense follows closely from immutability when it is recalled that according to the Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between time and change, what cannot possibly change cannot be measured by time. As the countable or measurable aspect of change conceived as involving a before and after, time is logically, epistemologically, and ontologically dependent upon change: time is defined by change, apprehended through change, and dependent upon change as its subject. Because in God the First Mover there is no movement from potency to act, no beginning or end, no succession, no before and after, God cannot be measured by time. Time cannot apply to that which is necessarily always the same:

> Only those beings which are moved are measured by time because *time is the number of motion*, as is clear in Book IV of the *Physics* [c. 11, 219bff]. But God is completely without motion, as has already been proved, and accordingly God is not measured by time. Hence there is no before and after in him. God does not have being after non-being, nor can God have non-being after being, nor can any succession be found in God's being; for these cannot be understood apart from time. Accordingly God lacks beginning or end, possessing his whole being at once. In this consists the nature of eternity.[59]

Three negative notes distinguish eternity: a lack of a beginning or end, a lack of succession of temporal parts, and a lack of any causal potentiality with respect to existence. Although Aquinas prefers to derive eternity from immutability, the notion of eternity as a denial of temporal parts means that eternity could also be derived from divine simplicity.[60] Aquinas correlates the approach to eternity through a denial of time with the traditional Boethian definition of eternity as "the perfect possesion all at once of unending life" (*interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta posessio*).[61] *Interminabilis* signifies the lack of a beginning or end; *tota simul* signifies the lack of successive parts; *possessio* implies the unshakable permanence of God's eternity; *perfecta* is a denial that eternity is evanescent like the now of time; and *vita* implies that eternity is associated with activity rather than

[57] Ibid., 152-163.

[58] I follow here the lines I laid out more extensively in "Aquinas on Eternity and Duration," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 525-548.

[59] SCG I, 15.

[60] See David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 12-41.

[61] ST I, 10, 1.

stasis. Eternity is fully realized and abiding existence; none of God's life is still to come and none has passed away. By contrast, temporal beings are distended into flowing temporal parts as they move away from their pasts and strive to achieve some future actuality or perfection.

The doctrine of divine eternity has received extensive attention in recent times both intramurally and extramurally. The seminal discussion by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann in their "Eternity"[62] has engendered a debate among interpreters of Aquinas regarding two main points. The first is whether eternity necessarily implies some kind of infinite, atemporal, *extended* duration. Stump and Kretzmann worry that to conceive eternity as unextended is to render it "roughly analogous to an isolated, static instant."[63] They prefer instead to conceive eternity as infinitely extended and so more like a limitless line, although they are careful to note how inadequate such spatial imagery can be. I have argued that while Aquinas does hold that divine eternity is an atemporal duration, it is not infinitely extended in the way that Stump and Kretzmann argue because I do not see how what is atemporal, indivisible, and partless could also be extended.[64] The second point of contention engendered by Stump and Kretzmann concerns the right way to understand the relationship between eternity and time. Ingeniously borrowing from relativity theory, Stump and Kretzmann argue that the relationship should be conceived according to a notion of simultaneity as relative to a particular frame of reference. I have argued, however, that the relationship between eternity and time is the relationship between the Creator and creation and so cannot be properly conceived apart from the doctrine of creation.[65]

The Thomistic view of eternity has been subject to external critique on several points. One main line, connected with criticisms of immutability, argues that an eternal God cannot be personal, active, and responsive. Thomists respond by arguing that a timeless God can perform the conscious activities that we associate with being a person. As we shall see in the following section, Aquinas believes that there is a perfect kind of activity that is beyond process or motion, while his critics seem to assume the opposite. As the activity of a perfect agent who is pure act, God's immanent activity does not entail any temporal location or extension because it does not involve any kind of process or motion.[66] When it comes to God's transient causal activity, it was argued earlier in the account of relational predication that Aquinas's account of causation allows him to locate the temporal dimension of the action in the recipient.[67] By one act that is identical with God's own being, the eternal God brings about effects that can be temporally located even though God as agent is not. A response to the claim that a timeless God cannot be genuinely responsive to the deeds and needs of temporal human beings will be made within the context of the forthcoming discussion of divine providence.

[62] *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-458.

[63] Ibid., 430.

[64] I argue for this view in "Eternity and Duration in Aquinas." A full bibliographical guide to the debate can be found there.

[65] I explore this theme more fully in "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (1997): 197-224.

[66] For more on the way in which God's action does not entail that God undergo a process, see Brian Davies, "The Action of God," *New Blackfriars* 75 (1994): 76-84.

[67] See Chapter Three, pp. 58–61.

A second main line of critique is that divine eternity seems to result in a denial of the dynamic reality of time: if all of time is present to God all at once, then does that not mean that time must really exist all at once? I have argued elsewhere, however, that this objection can be answered once the relationship between eternity and time is considered within the context of the doctrine of creation.[68] What is future to us is present to God as *creatura*, as the object or term of God's eternal causality. It is only when considered precisely as the effect of God's creative activity and thus taken up into the measure of divine eternity that all temporal beings are present to and coexist with God. When considered as passively produced and existing in time as in their own proper measure, created beings exist only at the times willed by God in the dynamic order of their temporal becoming. There is no temporal co-presence or simultaneous co-existence of all of time. It is therefore not the case that since God sees all things *tota simul*, then things must really exist *tota simul*. As we will see, strict isomorphism between knower and known is foreign to Aquinas's thought and inimical to any theory of divine omniscience. It is rather the case that whatever is known is known according to the modality of the knower, and Aquinas would argue that we must be careful not to conflate the mode of God's knowledge with the mode of existence of what God knows. When Aquinas says that God sees all things *tota simul*, the *tota simul* governs the mode of God's eternal knowledge and not the mode of temporal things' existence.[69]

## III. *VIA EMINENTIAE*: THE DIVINE PERFECTIONS

### *A. Divine Goodness*[70]

God's goodness is intimately connected with God's perfection.[71] In general, something is considered to be perfect when it fully actualizes the capacities belonging to it as an instance of its kind. Perfection is thus a function of actuality: the more something is actualized, the more perfect it is. Since all act is ultimately rooted in *esse* as the *act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections*, something is perfect to the degree that it realizes completely the *esse* that is appropriate to it. Since God is infinite act and *esse*, God is perfect. For Aquinas, God's goodness follows logically from God's perfection because to say that something is good is to imply that it is perfectly actual. In the case of God, however, the perfection in question is not species-relative: God is not perfect as an instance of a kind, but rather perfect absolutely and the source of all other perfections. According to this way of construing goodness in terms of the actuality of being, it follows that there is no distinction between God's nature and God's goodness because what makes God good is God's infinite *esse*; in every created being, its ultimate goodness consists in some actualization beyond the being it has by nature.[72]

[68] "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas."

[69] This point is nicely made in response to Anthony Kenny by R.W. Mulligan in "Divine Foreknowledge and Freedom: A Note on a Problem of Language," *The Thomist* 36 (1972): 296-299.

[70] Aquinas's account of God's goodness is heavily dependent upon Neoplatonic sources. For background, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).

[71] See ST I, 4 and SCG I, 28.

[72] ST I, 6, 3.

God's goodness is not reducible, however, to the claim that God is perfect. What good adds to our understanding of God beyond perfection is the notion of desirability. This is connected with Aquinas's doctrine that goodness is a transcendental or universal property of being that adds to the notion of being the notion of appetibility.[73] To say then that God is good is also to say that God is the supremely desirable object and the universal object of desire. This universal movement of all creation towards God is predicated upon the Neoplatonic causal principle that every effect strives to achieve some kind of likeness to its source. Insofar as each creature desires its own perfection, it is implicitly seeking to participate more fully in the originating actuality of its cause. According to this way of thinking, God is the end of the universe because God is the origin of the universe. God's goodness is explanatory of both origin and end. It is because God is good that God bestows being upon creation according to the Neoplatonic principle that it is of the very nature of goodness to be self-diffusive of its actuality (*bonum est diffusivum sui*). It is of the nature of goodness to cause something that it somehow similar to itself (every agent communicates something of its own likeness in causing another), and what is so caused achieves its perfection in realizing the greatest possible actualization of that similarity in being. So divine goodness is explanatory at the level of both efficient and final causality: it explains both the origination and end-directedness of the universe. Aquinas is careful to emphasize, however, that divine goodness is fundamentally a claim about God's final causality rather than God's efficient causality because he does not want to admit that the natural diffusiveness of goodness entails that God necessarily creates the universe.[74] There are some interpreters of Aquinas who see that claim as inconsistent, however, and argue that the nature of divine goodness does indeed entail that God must create.[75] More will be said about this in the context of divine willing.

*B. Divine Knowledge*

There are two fundamental arguments in Aquinas to establish God's knowledge. The first is based on God's immateriality.[76] Aquinas's understanding of knowledge is based on the Aristotelian principle that knowledge involves a formal unity between knower and known: to know is to have the form of another without, however, actually becoming the other. When I know a stone, for example, my mind is united to the form of the stone without my changing into a stone. What accounts for the difference between the form of the stone as it exists in my mind and the form of the stone as it exists in the stone is that the stone-as-known exists immaterially in my intellect whereas it has a material existence in the actual stone. Both the form-as-known and the knower knowing must be immaterial in order to explain how knowledge takes place. Given this basic understanding of knowledge, it is a rather straightforward move to the conclusion that God must know on the

[73] On goodness as a transcedental, see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 290-334.

[74] See Julien Peghaire, "L'Axiome 'Bonum est diffusivum sui' dans le néo-platonisme et le thomisme," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 1 (1932): 5*-30*. See also Fran O'Rourke.

[75] Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 223-225.

[76] ST I, 14, 1.

basis of the claim that God is immaterial. Knowledge is ultimately rooted in something still more basic, however, than immateriality: actuality and *esse*. Actuality understood in terms of *esse* explains both why something is knowable and why a knower is intelligent. The greater the actuality of the knower, the greater its ability to exercize the intelligible form of another. The greater the degree of spirituality and actuality, the greater the ability to know. God as infinite immaterial actuality is both the supreme knower and the supreme intelligible object.

The second argument for God's knowledge is based on perfection.[77] If God is perfect and knowing is a perfection, then God must be a knower. In the Thomistic view, knowledge is an analogical perfection realized in different fashions according to the different modes of being proper to humans, angels, and God. Knowledge as a way of being involves the knower's transcendence of the limitations ingredient in having a form in a material way. Non-knowers are simply what they are according to their form, while knowers are enriched and expanded in their being by immaterially sharing in the actuality of other beings. A knower is a kind of center of synthesis wherein the perfections of other beings are united in the act of knowing. In God, that unity is perfectly realized in God's own act of being.

Following upon Aristotle, Aquinas stresses the primacy in God of self-knowledge as the complete self-presence of Pure Act.[78] Whereas the human intellect passively depends upon the reception of a specifying form from another (*species intelligibilis*) as a necessary condition for its act of knowing, God is not dependent upon any other actuality outside Himself to exercise the immanent perfection of knowledge. God knows Himself through Himself: subject, object, and principle of knowledge are all identical in God. Moreover divine simplicity demands that there be no distinction in God between substance, knowing power, and the exercise of that power as there is in human knowing: the divine essence (itself identical with the divine *esse*), the divine intellect, and the divine act of knowing are completely identical and perfectly actual. Aquinas emphasizes the perfect simplicity by saying that "in God intellect, what is known, the intelligible species, and the act of knowing are completely one and the same."[79]

The very perfection of God's self-knowledge appears to rule out the possibility of knowledge of what is other than God because it does not permit the normal (human) mode of access to cognitive union through the passive reception of and assimilation to the form of the other through an intelligible species. In addition to the apparent lack of epistemic contact, within the Aristotelian tradition there is also the problem of motive: why should self-thinking Pure Act turn its attention to what is inferior? Aquinas's God is not Aristotle's God, however, but rather a Provident Creator; this relationship explains both how and why God has knowledge of the world. Aquinas adopts the Neoplatonic theme of divine causal knowledge and argues that God's self-knowledge is *ipso facto* a knowledge of the world because God knows Himself to be the cause of the world; God's perfect self-knowledge must extend as far as His causal power. The logic of Aquinas's treatment of the

[77] SCG I, 44.

[78] See ST I, 14, 2.

[79] ST I, 14, 4. The reconciliation of divine simplicity with divine knowledge is complicated in Aquinas by his doctrine of divine ideas. On this point see John F. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas on Divine Ideas*, Etienne Gilson Series 16 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993).

extent of divine knowledge involves a progressive unfolding of the extent of divine causality. Aquinas surpasses the limits of previous Neoplatonic causal knowing accounts by intimately and directly connecting God to every being as its transcendent creative source and immanent *causa esse*.

In keeping with the context of creation, Aquinas employs the paradigm of the practical knowledge of an artisan as the main model for how God knows the world. It is vital to notice that ingredient in the causal-practical model is the idea that the divine intellect's relationship to the world is the obverse of our own: whereas our knowledge passively presupposes the existence of its object and is measured by it, God's causal knowledge actively precedes and measures what it knows.[80] God's knowledge of the world is independent of any causal determination by what is known. While our intellects are passively assmilated to what we know, God's intellect actively assimilates what is known to itself by causing things to be in imitation of the divine essence. God does not know things because they are, but rather things are because they are creatively known by God.

One of the crucial presuppositions of Aquinas's overall account of divine knowledge is the Neoplatonic principle that knowledge takes its modality from the knower rather than from the known.[81] There does not need to be a strict isomorphism between the knower and the known in order for knowledge to take place. Here it means that God does not have to be material or have sense organs in order to know material individuals; instead, God can have immaterial knowledge of the material. Aquinas invokes this axiom time and time again throughout the course of his explanation of how God knows the world. Without this premise it would be impossible for Aquinas to explain how a being that is simple, immaterial, unchanging, and eternal could know what is composite, material, mutable, and temporal.

Aquinas argues that there cannot be any discursive structure to God's knowledge. Discursive knowledge, as exemplified in syllogistic reasoning, implies a process of succession between distinct and logically connected intellectual acts. Obviously there can be no such discursiveness in a simple, immutable, eternal God; there can be no movement from ignorance (potency) to knowledge (act), no temporal or logical succession of intellectual acts.[82] Aquinas likewise denies that God's knowledge is propositional, since knowledge through composing and dividing so as to form propositions is a function of the limitations and potentiality of the human intellect: we come to knowledge by combining and separating partial aspects of reality (subjects and predicates, substances and accidents, genus and species, etc.) into propositions which then form the basis of our inferences. God's knowledge of everything through His own eternal essence obviously involves none

[80] See DV 2, 8; DV 1, 2; and the essay by Josef Pieper, "The Negative Element in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas" in *The Silence of St. Thomas*, trans. John Murray, S.J. and Daniel O'Connor (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), 45-71. Also, Mark Jordan "The Intelligibility of the World and the Divine Ideas in Aquinas," *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1984): 17-32.

[81] "Whatever is known is known according to the modality of the knower" is a variation on the idea that "whatever is received in something is received according to the mode of the receiver". See John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom 'What is Received is Received According to the Mode of the Receiver'," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Ruth-Link Salinger et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 279-289.

[82] See ST I, 14, 7 and SCG I, 57.

of these limitations and therefore cannot be propositional. And as William Alston has demonstrated, this entails that God's knowledge is nothing like what is involved in contemporary conceptions of knowledge as a form of belief because the latter entails some kind of propositional attitude.[83] God has no beliefs.

A causal model of divine knowledge includes a recognition of the essential role of the divine will. Knowledge qua knowledge is not a transitive activity productive of something outside the knower. An exemplar form in the mind of an intelligent agent only becomes actually productive through an act of will. Likewise God's knowledge is causal and practical by virtue of an act of the divine will (*voluntate adjuncta*) bringing into being what is known. Aquinas calls this causal-willing knowledge the knowledge of approbation (*scientia approbationis*).[84] God knows the world through His essence by knowing what He wills to exist; God's knowledge about any contingent fact is a kind of self-knowledge about His will (and His causality) with regard to any contingent fact.[85] Aquinas also distinguishes between knowledge of vision (*scientia visionis)* and knowledge of simple intelligence (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*). The latter is God's knowledge of what He never actually wills to exist at any time but could have possibly willed to exist.[86] It should be noted that there is no mental process whereby God first speculatively considers the various possibilities (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*), then practically decides to execute one plan (*scientia approbationis*), and finally contemplates the finished product (*scientia visionis*); Molinists typically misread Aquinas in this way.[87]

The greatest source of controversy among Thomists concerns not how God knows the things that will never exist, however, but rather how God knows what does not exist now but will exist in the future. Specifically, the perennial problem of how God knows future contingent human actions and whether such knowledge is compatible with human freedom has lately been given extended consideration by Thomists because of the interest in the foreknowledge problem among philosophers of religion.[88] Aquinas is usually categorized as proposing a Boethian solution to the problem insofar as he argues that God's eternal knowledge of time means that God does not have *fore*knowledge of human actions because God's knowledge is outside of time. It is rather the case that God has knowledge of all things as eternally present. Hence the foreknowledge problem dissolves because one of its premises is that God have infallible knowledge that temporally precedes future human action. Not all participants in the contemporary debate would agree, however, that this move still leaves room for genuine freedom; critiques of the Thomist position would argue that a serious problem remains.[89] Among defenders

[83] "Does God have Beliefs?", *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 291.

[84] ST I, 14, 8.

[85] See William Mann, "Epistemology Supernaturalized," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 448.

[86] ST I, 14, 9.

[87] For a critique of a Molinist reading, see Theodore J. Kondoleon , "God's Knowledge of Future Contingent Singulars: A Reply," *The Thomist* 56 (1992): 117-139. See also M. de la Taille, S.J., "Sur les diverse classifications de la science divine," *Recherches de science réligieuse*, 13 (1923): 7-23; 535-542.

[88] Something of a survey of the problem can be found in Linda Zagzebski's *The Dilemma of Foreknowledge and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[89] Ibid. 43-65.

of the Thomistic position there has been argument about whether the appeal to eternity is sufficient in the light of the causal character of God's knowledge.[90] If God's knowledge is somehow causative of human action, then the appeal to eternity only solves part of the problem and still leaves unaswered the question of how God's causation is compatible with human freedom; this latter question has been traditionally considered in the context of divine providence, which will be treated in the next section.

*C. The Divine Will*

In Aquinas's way of thinking, there is a tight conceptual link between intellect and will: will is the way that rational beings are related to their good. Every being naturally seeks the good as what is perfective of itself as a member of its kind.[91] When a being does not possess its proper good, it strives to achieve it; when it achieves that good, it rests in it. The inherent universal tendency of each thing towards its proper good is called appetite by Aquinas. When a being has an intellect, it is related to its proper good in an intellectual manner; that is, it pursues its perfection in a self-conscious and intellectual manner. Will as rational appetite describes the way intellectual creatures are related to their good precisely as known. Hence it is easy to see why Aquinas would ascribe will to God. Since God has already been shown to have an intellect, God must have a will. This is to say that God is related to his own good in an intellectual manner. Since God already possesses the fullness of being by nature, God's will is not related to God's good as something to be achieved, but rather to be rested in. It must be remembered here that according to the doctrine of divine simplicity, God's will and God's good are the same in referent. The good that God has by nature is the principle object of the divine will. The relationship between God's will and God's own goodness is a necessary one in that God must will his own good as the perfection of his nature.

Since God's appetite for goodness is completely satisfied in his own being, God does not need to will anything other than himself. God's will is thus contingently related to creation. As noted earlier, it has been argued by Norman Kretzmann that Aquinas's adherence to the principle that goodness is naturally self-communicative or self-diffusive should commit him to the conclusion that God's will is necessitated to create. According to Kretzmann, God is not free with respect to whether to create a world but rather only with respect to what kind of world to create. Aquinas himself, however, explicitly disavows such a necessitarian conclusion. He argues instead that the self-diffusive nature of goodness explains why it is fitting or appropriate that God create but does not require that God create. In Aquinas's understanding of God, it is in the inner life of the Trinity that God's

[90] I have argued that an appeal to divine eternity is incomplete without an appeal to divine causality in "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas." For a different view, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "God's Knowledge and its Causal Effects," in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*," ed. Thomas Senor (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 94-124. They explicitly criticize my views in "Eternity and God's Knowledge: A Reply to Shanley," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 439-445. My response follows as "Aquinas on God's Causal Knowledge: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," 447-457.

[91] ST I, 19, 1.

self-diffusiveness is ultimately realized.[92] Since both God's metaphysical self-sufficiency and God's inner Trinitarian life rule out self-perfection or self-realization as a motive for creation, the end or that-for-the-sake-of-which God creates is the gratuitous diffusion of goodness. God's wills other things for the sake of his own goodness, not in the sense that the willing is necessary to achieve that goodness, but rather in the sense that the willing manifests the goodness. The communication of being and goodness in creation is motivated by God's own goodness as its freely chosen and generous self-manifestation.[93] In willing his own goodness, God wills everything else to exist for the sake of sharing in that goodness through the one single act of will that is identical with God's own being.

In willing to create a world for the sake of his own goodness, God wills that creatures achieve some share in that goodness through self-perfective activity. It is vital to note that God's ordering of all things to their proper ends is intimately connected to creation and conservation. The very same creative act that originates and sustains the world also imparts a providential order to everything that exists. Providence is not something that God does *after* God creates. Aquinas sees providence as a logical consequence of God's causal knowledge: what is creatively thought by God the divine artisan must be ordered by Him.[94] Aquinas distinguishes between (1) the *ratio* or plan in God's mind whereby all things are ordered to their proper ends, which is providence in the strict sense, and (2) the disposition or execution of the divine plan, which is called governance; the former is identical with God's immanent activity and so eternal, while the latter is temporal.[95] God's intentions, responses, purposes, and plans are temporally realized in creation as effects of the one infinitely fecund eternal act of knowledge and will that originates the world in being. God wills that one thing happen after another and because of another in the temporal unfolding of the divine plan through the activity of secondary causes.[96] God's providence is thus not a series of *ad hoc* adjustments or interferences in some order operating independently from God, but rather a part of the causal order established by eternal providence that includes the free actions of human beings.

The relationship between God's will and human freedom is obviously the most vexing question associated with divine providence.[97] In order to understand how Aquinas handles the problem, however, it is necessary to recall the overarching theme that God works in each thing according to its own nature. Aquinas argues that the temporal execution of God's eternal plan is accomplished through the mediation of genuine secondary causation. God's providence does not ride roughshod over secondary causes but rather works through them. This means that

[92] See Gregory Reichberg, "The Communication of the Divine Nature: Thomas's Response to Neoplatonism," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 66 (1992): 215-228. W. Norris Clarke discusses the principle of the self-diffusiveness of the good and its relationship to God in *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 221-227.

[93] See Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation*.

[94] ST I, 22, 2.

[95] ST I, 22.

[96] ST I, 22, 3.

[97] I have discussed this question at length in "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 99-122. Some of that material has been adapted here.

divine providence does not squeeze contingency out of the universe but rather provides for contingent causes as the means by which the divine plan is accomplished. God's providence pertains not just to outcomes, but also to the ordering of means; God decides what comes about and how it comes about.[98] God provides that some things come about necessarily through necessary causes and that some things come about contingently through contingent causes. Aquinas emphasizes that the divine will is the ultimate cause why things happen in the way that they do. Rejecting the suggestion that the root of necessity and contingency lies in secondary causation, Aquinas explains:

> How necessary and contingent things occur is better explained by the efficacy of the divine will. For when an efficacious cause is put to work, the effect follows not only as to the fact that it happens, but also as to the mode of its happening and being. . . . Since the divine will is the most efficacious cause, it follows not just that those things come about that God wants to come about, but also that they come about in the manner that God wills. God wills that some things come about necessarily and some others contingently, so that the order of things might fill out the universe. Accordingly God provides that some things come about by necessary causes that cannot fail, from which effects result necessarily, while for other things God provides defectible contingent causes, from which effects result contingently. Hence what is willed by God to happen contingently is not contingent on the basis of the proximate cause, but because God has willed that it happen contingently and so has provided contingent causes to accomplish this.[99]

Aquinas acknowledges that it is hard for us to conceive how the causation of the divine will can be non-coercive. He argues that this is due to our failure to recognize the utterly transcendent character of the divine will. God's will is that of the Creator who transcends the order of necessary and contingent causes that bring about the divine purposes. In Aquinas's last and most penetrating major treatment of the problem of divine foreknowledge and future contingents, *Expositio libri Peryermenias* I, 14, he explains that the apparent conflict is due to an anthropomorphic conception of God's knowledge and will. With respect to the divine will he says:

> Similar differences are to be noted with respect to the divine will. For the divine will is to be understood as existing outside the order of existing beings, as the cause producing every being and all their differences. The distinction in being between what is necessary and what is possible, rooted in the nature of the proximate cause, originates from the divine will. For the effects God wills to be necessary God provides necessary causes, while for the effects that God wills to be contingent, God provides contingent agents who can fail. It is according to the condition of these causes that effects are said to be necessary or contingent,

[98] SCG I, 85.

[99] ST I, 19, 8. On God as the ultimate origin of necessity and contingency, see also *In Metaphysicorum* VI, l. 3.

> but they all depend upon the divine will as the first cause that transcends the order of necessity and contingency. This cannot be said of any human will or any other cause, because every other cause falls under the categories of necessity or contingency and hence it must be that either the cause itself can fail or that its effect not be contingent but necessary. While the will of God is unfailing, nevertheless not all its effects are necessary, but rather some are contingent.[100]

Aquinas's major argument for the compatibility of divine causation and genuine contingency is the transcendent nature of the former. Only a cause that transcends and indeed creates contingency and necessity as modes of created being can work through them without violating or rivaling them. Although Aquinas describes God as an "exterior" moving cause of the will, he makes it clear that God alone is able to move the will because God is intimately present to the will as its creator, and that it is precisely this creative interiority that explains why the divine motion is not coercive. In *Summa contra gentiles* III, 88, Aquinas explains that only the very cause of an intellectual nature can incline the will from within as a moving cause. Any other kind of moving cause acting on the will would violate its nature and freedom because it would coerce it extrinsically. Only God, as the immediate creator and sustainer of the spiritual soul's existence and its power of willing, is able to move the will without doing it violence. God's motion is not an enemy to the will's freedom as a coercive cause, but rather constitutive of that freedom as the will's *causa essendi*. Aquinas consistently asserts that the divine motion does not causally determine the will to any particular good, and he studiously avoids the term *praedeterminatio* precisely because of its undesirable overtones of divine determinism.[101] It is rather that God moves the will so that it acts in accord with its own nature as a *self-determining* power:

> It ought to be noted that, as Dionysius says, it does not pertain to providence to destroy the nature of things but rather to preserve them. Hence providence moves all things in accord with their natures in such a way that by the divine motion necessary effects follow from necessary causes and contingent effects follow from contingent causes. Accordingly, because the will is an active principle not determined to one thing but rather related non-determinately to many things, God so moves the will that it is not determined to one thing but rather its motion remains contingent and not necessary, except for those things to which it is moved by its own nature.[102]

[100] *Expositio libri Peryermenias* I, 14; 78-79, ll.437-461, ed. R.-A. Gauthier, *Opera omnia*, Vol. I-1 (Rome, 1989). On this passage see Charles Boyer, "Providence et liberté dans un texte de Saint Thomas," *Gregorianum* 19 (1938): 194-209. See also DM 16, 7ad 15 and QL XII, 3.

[101] See M.-J. Congar, "*Praedeterminare* et *praedeterminatio* chez S. Thomas," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 23 (1934): 363-371.

[102] ST I-II, 10, 4. There are numerous other texts where Aquinas makes it clear that God's causation does not determine the will's choice but rather that the will is self-determinative: e.g., DP 3, 7 ad 13; II Sent. 39, 1, 1; SCG I, 68, and DV 22, 6 ad 1.

The nature of this non-determinative *motio* whereby God causes the will to be *causa sui* and self-determinative remains opaque. The metaphysical datum is that the potency of the will demands that it be moved by God as First Mover. Aquinas explains that this motion is interior, non-coercive, and non-determining (Aquinas equates determination with necessitation) because the Creator acts in what is created so as to preserve its nature. Rather like Aquinas's doctrine of God in general, his description of this divine motion follows the *via negativa*: it is not at all like any other motion and it is easier to say what it is not than to explain what it is. It is a *sui generis* kind of causation for which we have no obvious analogue. Attempts by Banezians to explain this motion through the concept of *praemotio physica*[103] fill in the gaps of Aquinas's account by drawing the rigorous metaphysical consequences of the normal workings of efficient causation. But insofar as this causal apparatus purports to define in great detail the mechanism whereby God moves the will, and especially by its introduction of an intermediate and determinate created term (*intentio*) between the will and its own act, it compromises both the transcendence of God's causation and the self-determining power of the will. Divine transcendence is compromised because the causal mechanism brings God's motion within the categories of created realities by positing a real term (*intentio*) which does the moving. Human freedom is compromised because it is hard to see how a divine causal predetermination that moves the will infallibly and efficaciously to perform a particular good act[104] leaves freedom intact, especially when Aquinas himself is adamant in denying that God's motion is causally predetermining in any way. There is not a single text in Aquinas where he asserts that there is any kind of divinely-caused predetermining *intentio* in the human will. Aquinas's silence about exactly how it all works is not an oversight or a failure of nerve, but rather an acknowledgement of the limitations of human thought in the face of divine transcendence.

It is precisely in virtue of this sense of God's transcendent causation that Aquinas's notion of human freedom goes sharply against the modern grain because it means that he does not think that causal independence from God is a necessary condition for human freedom. Human freedom requires causal independence from any other creature, but not from the Creator; in this sense Aquinas is not readily classifiable in contemporary terms as either a compatibilist or an incompatibilist. To be *causa sui* does not require that one be *causa prima* because God is not a rival agent threatening the integrity of human freedom, but rather the transcendent Creator who makes human beings to be and to act freely:

> It should be said that freedom of choice is the cause of its own motion because a person moves himself into action by freedom of choice. But it is not necessary for freedom that what is free be its own first cause, just as it is not required that whatever causes another be its first cause. Accordingly, God is the first cause

[103] An accessible full-blown exposition and defense of the *praemotio physica* position is found in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1953), 240-323.

[104] The *praemotio* position runs into serious problems in trying to account for divine involvement with evil. For a taste of this, see Jacques Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1966).

> moving both natural and voluntary causes. And just as in moving natural causes God does not destroy their natural abilities, so by moving voluntary causes God does not destroy their voluntary actions *but rather makes them to be such.* For God works in each thing in accord with its own nature.[105]

Jean-Luc Marion has argued that Aquinas is separated from the subsequent scholastic and modern onto-theological tradition by a deeper sense of divine transcendence that is rooted in creation and reflected in a different sense of divine causation.[106] God does not cause as the supreme or most powerful Being among beings; God cannot be encompassed by an *a priori* concept of being or an *a priori* concept of causation. The radical transcendence and distinction of the Creator God from the created world means that God empowers rather than overpowers creaturely freedom. God generously allows created beings to share in divine providence as bearing the dignity of causes in their own right. This is especially true of the human person, who falls under divine providence as a secondary cause of a peculiar kind because it belongs to him to reflect the Creator's own mode of causation through his free, rational, provident, and self-determining actions.[107] In this way human beings reflect the divine image and reveal something of the nature of the free divine creativity that originates free human creativity. This leads Herbert McCabe to assert that free human activity is paradoxically more immediately and directly caused by God than other actions precisely because it is a sharing in God's own creative freedom.[108]

One notable way in which divine providence involves free human action is through petitionary prayer. According to one view of how petitionary prayer works, God must do something *after* a petition is made and as a result of the petition in order for God's action to count as a genuine response. As expressed in many episodes in the Bible, God's response to petitionary prayer often seems tantamount to a change in God's will. Aquinas, however, rejects the idea that petitionary prayer is an attempt to change God's will. Aquinas instead views petitionary prayer as one of the many forms of secondary causality eternally established by God to effect divine providence:

> And thus it is necessary to explain the efficacy of prayer in such a way that we neither impose necessity upon the human affairs subject to divine providence nor make the divine plan mutable. To make this clear it ought to be said that divine providence not only arranges which effects occur, but also the causal order by which they come about. Now among other causes, the causes of some things are human actions. Hence it follows that humans perform certain actions, not so that through those actions the divine arrangement might be changed, but rather so that through those actions certain effects might come about according to the order arranged by God. The same applies to natural causes. And it is

[105] ST I, 83, 1 ad 3. Emphasis added.

[106] "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logy," *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 31-65. I have discussed his views more fully in my "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-theology, and Marion" *The Thomist* 60 (October, 1996): 617-625.

[107] ST I, 22, 2 ad 4.

[108] *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 14.

> likewise with prayer. For we do not petition in order to change the divine plan, but rather we pray so that what God has arranged might be accomplished through the prayers of holy people.[109]

Prayer is efficacious not because it changes God, but because it is part of the temporal causal order arranged by God to be efficacious in the realization of God's eternal plan. Prayer does not change God's will, but rather carries it out as one of the secondary causes ordained to accomplish the divine plan. God wills that some things come about as a result of or in answer to our petitions, including our salvation.[110] Both the prayer itself and the response are a part of God's plan. God does not have to change His will in order to will a change,[111] and God eternally ordains that some changes take place because of our prayers.

One last topic pertaining to the divine will that deserves some consideration is the question of divine omnipotence: are there any limits on what the will of God can do? Aquinas discusses God's power as God's active ability to bring about distinct effects, and he denies that God has the potency or "power" to be subject to the action of another. Aquinas correlates the capacity for action in a being with its form; beings have the capacities for action that they do based on their form. The greater the degree of actuality of the form, the greater the capacity of the form to achieve effects. Since God's being is infinite act, God's power to act is correspondingly infinite.[112] In discussing the meaning of divine omnipotence, however, Aquinas recognizes that what God can do is not absolutely unbounded. Aquinas argues that power must be understood with reference to the possible and that the possible must be understood with respect to what does not imply a contradiction. In other words, God's power to *do* is correlated to what can *be*; whatever can be, God can do. Squaring a circle, for example, is something that cannot be done because it cannot be; Aquinas would say that it is a feat that cannot even be conceived, never mind done, since it requires the mind to think a contradiction. Hence rather than say that it is something that God cannot do, it is better to say simply that it cannot be done.[113] Aquinas thinks that changing the past falls under this category. If it was the case that Socrates sat down yesterday at 3 PM, then it is not possible today that it was also true yesterday at 3 PM that Socrates did not sit down. Once an event is actualized and becomes past, there is subsequently no longer any potency for its opposite to occur. So God cannot change the past because the past cannot be changed.[114]

[109] ST II-II, 83, 2. See also SCG III, 95-96. The best defense of Thomas's view of prayer that I have seen is in Brian Davies, *Thinking About God* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 307-334. See also John F.X. Knasas, "Aquinas: Prayer to an Immutable God," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983): 196-221.

[110] Aquinas explains how prayer is a part of the order established by divine providence to bring about the salvation of the predestined in ST I, 23, 8.

[111] ST I, 19, 7.

[112] ST I, 25, 2.

[113] ST I, 25, 3.

[114] ST I, 25, 4.

Peter Geach has argued, however, that to describe Aquinas's doctrine of divine omnipotence as constrained simply by logical consistency is not accurate.[115] There are logically consistent feats, such as lying or promise-breaking, that God cannot do and Aquinas recognizes this.[116] Active power is a success term in Aquinas and so to ascribe infinite active power to God is to claim that God can bring about all that can be described as a successful action. Sin is a privation in an action, however, the absence of some feature in the action that ought to be there. If God were to sin, that would require some failure on the part of God's will or intellect. Hence it is contradictory to ascribe to God both the active power to accomplish all things and the capacity to fail; if God can fail or act defectively, then God is not omnipotent. Aquinas also argues that is incompatible with what has already been established about God's goodness and wisdom for God to perform certain kinds of actions.[117]

[115] Geach is rather critical of Aquinas in his discussion of conceptions of omnipotence in *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 3-28, but the view he ends up defending is rather close to Aquinas's real view.

[116] See ST I, 25, 3 ad 2; SCG, II, 25; and III Sent. d. 1, q. 2, a. 3.

[117] In the foregoing discussion I have been concerned with God's power absolutely considered (*potentia absoluta*) as distinguished from what can be said to be within God's power given God's determinate willing of the actual order of salvation (*potentia ordinata*). For more on this distinction in Aquinas, see Lawrence Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 229-295.

# 9. Religious Pluralism

Traditional Roman Catholic thinking on the plurality of religions has been dominated by the question whether there can be salvation for those who are outside the Church. The formula that long normed the debate appeared to enshrine a kind of official pessimism: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – outside the Church no one is saved.[1] The reason for this was the clear teaching of the New Testament that faith in Jesus Christ, the unique mediator, redeemer, and bringer of salvation, was a necessary condition for salvation: *Without faith it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:6) and *There is no salvation in anyone else [Jesus] at all for there is no other name under heaven granted to men by which we may receive salvation* (Acts 4:12). It was therefore long thought that Sacred Scripture entails exclusivism. In order to be saved, it is necessary to confess faith in Jesus Christ and receive baptism in his name for the forgiveness of sins. Since the Church is the community of the faithful and the baptized, it is necessary to be a part of it in order to be saved. According to this logic, all those who lack faith in Christ and so stand outside the Church are not on the way to salvation. The Church historically held that non-Christian religions had no efficacious value for salvation, and so adherents of such religions ought to be proselytized in order that they might come to the faith necessary for salvation. Yet the pessimistic conclusion that vast numbers of people are outside the way of salvation appears to contradict the obvious meaning of another key Scriptural text governing the discussion: *[God's] will it is that all men should find salvation and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2: 4). This universal salvific will of God appears to be massively thwarted if salvation is exclusively through explicit faith in Jesus Christ. Hence the central problem: how can the exclusivity of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ be balanced with the universal will of God to bring all people to salvation?

At the heart of the twentieth-century debate in the Roman Catholic and Thomistic context has been the desire to find a way to balance these two competing strands of the New Testament and the tradition in such a way as somehow to save the truth of both. The century was marked by an increasing optimism about the prospect of salvation for non-Christians that culminated in the teaching of the

[1] For an historical overview, see Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

Second Vatican Council (1962-65). In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*), a central theme is that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation; that is, the Church is the unique historical institution willed by God to make salvation through Christ efficaciously present in the world. Within this context, the traditional claim that outside the Church there is no salvation is interpreted as tantamount to a claim about the sacramentality of the Church rather than a judgment about the ultimate fate of individual non-Christians. Those who stand outside the Church can be genuinely related to God and so implicitly related to the Church as the sacrament of God.[2] Adherents of non-Christian religions are related to the Church according to the degree of convergence in belief; the closest are the Jews, followed by Muslims, then practitioners of other religions. Even those who have not encountered the gospel and express no conscious religious belief can nevertheless be saved by the grace of God if they follow the dictates of conscience. In the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (*Nostra aetate*), the Council calls for respectful mutual dialogue with other religions.

In the context of this increasing optimism about salvation outside the Church, a major task of Thomists has been to find ways to mitigate Aquinas's original exclusivism. In accord with the common teaching that prevailed until this past century, Aquinas held that an explicit act of faith in Christ was a necessary condition for salvation in the time after Christ's coming. A background presupposition to this claim, however, was that the Gospel had been effectively proclaimed everywhere such that any rejection of it was morally culpable. The increasing trend among Thomists has been to reject that presupposition, and argue that non-Christians should be treated according to the standards of implicit faith developed by Aquinas for pre-Christians because both groups are non-culpably hindered from explicit faith in Christ by their circumstances. The object of debate then is to define just what implicit faith means and how it is connected with explicit doctrinal content and practices. As I shall outline the development in this chapter, the trajectory of the discussion moves toward an increasingly attenuated connection between implicit faith and explicit confession and practice. According to this trend, saving faith occurs in a depth dimension of human experience that can be opaque to intellectual reflection such that even a conscious atheist can unconsciously be a believer. The ultimate criterion for saving faith is moral action rather than propositional confession. The first part of the chapter will explore this tendency in its traditional non-transcendental forms. In the altered climate that ushered in and followed from the Second Vatican Council, the prevailing theological mood favored some form of what has come to be known as inclusivism. Inclusivism defines itself against exclusivism by its claims that non-Christians can be saved and that non-Christian religions can be salvific; it defines itself against pluralism by holding that Christ is the unique cause of all salvation, even when it is mediated by non-Christian religions. Far and away the most influential proponent of inclusivism has been Karl Rahner, who claims that conscious adherents of other religions (or even no religion at all) can nonetheless be in an implicit faith relationship with Christ at the transcendental level and so be

[2] *Lumen gentium*, 16.

anonymous Christians. Rahner's views, deeply dependent on the transcendental anthropology outlined in Chapter Seven, will be the focus of the second part of the chapter. Rahner's project has much in common with the non-transcendental approach and has clearly influenced some of the interpretations of Aquinas outlined in the first part of the chapter, but it goes beyond them in situating its treatment of religious pluralism within a consistent and comprehensive background structure.

As noted at the outset, Christian reflection on the diversity of religions has been through the prism of the question of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians. Ingredient in the inclusivist evaluation of other religions is the idea that they are implicitly aiming at what Christians understand by salvation. But according to Joseph A. DiNoia, this assumption begs an important question: do other religions indeed aim at Christian salvation? Or is it rather the case that other religions have radically different doctrines of the final end of life, and so promote ways of life that are fundamentally different from the Christian life? DiNoia wants to argue that if Roman Catholics are to engage in the kind of mutual dialogue with non-Christian religions envisioned by *Nostra aetate*, then they must not begin by assuming that their ends must somehow be soteriological in the Christian sense. If one takes other religions at their own word about the end of life and the means to attain it, then it will no longer be possible to interpret them as unconsciously aiming at Christian salvation in an inclusivist fashion. DiNoia argues that it is misguided to view non-Christians as presently being affiliated in some hidden way with Christians since they may aim at a non-soteriological end. If such people are to be saved through Christ, it will therefore have to be as a result of some future or prospective relationship with Christ rather than as a result of some present implicit relationship to Christ. DiNoia's novel approach, which relies on Thomistic principles while also drawing from some non-Thomistic sources, will be outlined in the final section of this chapter.

## I. IMPLICIT FAITH AND THE SALVATION OF NON-CHRISTIANS

Aquinas takes it as axiomatic and non-negotiable that some kind of faith is necessary for salvation.[3] As primarily an intellectual act, faith must have some definite object and content. Faith for Aquinas is not a vague feeling or contentless trust, but rather an assent to a definite body of truths on the authority of God revealing. Because faith is an assent to the truth of a proposition on the authority of God revealing, it implies that a believer assents to some definitely formulatable truths related to God (material object) on the basis of a prior assent in grace to God himself as self-revealing First Truth (formal object). When it comes to specifying the content of what is to be believed, however, Aquinas makes a number of interesting distinctions based on different intellectual abilities and offices in the Church, different periods in salvation history, and different levels of exposure to the Gospel. Twentieth-century Thomists have tried to mine these distinctions in ways that allow for a more optimistic and inclusivist reading of Aquinas.

[3] ST II-II, 2, 3. On the nature of faith in Aquinas and its relationship to natural knowledge, see Chapter Two.

One of Aquinas's most fundamental characterizations of the Church is that it is the assembly of the faithful or *aggregatio fidelium*.[4] Yet within the community of faith that is the Church, not everyone is required explicitly to believe the same set of truths.[5] What all must explicitly believe is expressed in the Creed; this is the minimum set of truths to which all must explicitly adhere. All the other truths of the faith are contained in the articles of faith in a way analogous to how general or universal principles contain all the conclusions that can be drawn from them. The work of drawing the conclusions of the faith into broader, explicit, and detailed propositional form belongs to those entrusted with the task of teaching in the Church (the pope, bishops, and theologians). It is not incumbent upon all believers to draw the explicit conclusions. With respect to what is taught and held by those with explicit and detailed knowledge of the faith, the rest of the community of the Church can be said to have implicit faith. Lacking either the ability or the opportunity to draw the conclusions themselves, those with implicit faith accept on the authority of competent others what they are unable to make explicit for themselves. What is important to note here is that in this context Aquinas thinks there is a logical connection between explicit and implicit faith: a believer can be said to have implicit faith in what follows logically from what is explicitly believed.

The crucial question in Aquinas pertaining to the problem of salvation and non-Christian religions is whether explicit faith in Christ is required of all people for their salvation.[6] Aquinas argues that since the Incarnation and Passion of Christ are the means by which we come to beatitude, it is required that all those who come to beatitude believe in it. But, says Aquinas, faith in Christ will be realized differently according to different times and peoples. From the time of the Fall of Adam until the coming of Christ, faith in Christ was implicit in both Jews and Gentiles. In the case of the Jews, Aquinas asserts that their leaders had some kind of explicit awareness of Christ as prefigured in the sacrifices of the Law, while the followers had only an implicit or veiled awareness of Christ. In the case of the Gentiles, while Aquinas did think that some had received explicit private revelations pertaining to Christ, in a more general way he ascribes to them the possibility of implicit faith in Christ through a faith in God's existence and God's providence; for the Gentiles, to have believed that a providential God exists who would liberate us in ways of his own choosing was tantamount to implicit faith in Christ. In the context of a discussion whether the articles of faith have increased with the passage of time, Aquinas argues that while their explicit content has increased, what is known later was implicitly contained in what was believed earlier so that the substance of what is believed has remained constant.[7] The first principle of faith, implicitly containing all the rest, is identified on the basis of Hebrews 11: 6 (*He that comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*) as comprising the existence of God and the providence of God. While over the course of time the nature of God and God's providence have become clearer

[4] See George Sabra, *Thomas Aquinas' Vision of the Church* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1987).

[5] See DV 14, 11 and ST II-II, 2, 6.

[6] ST II-II, 2, 7.

[7] ST II-II, 1, 7.

and clearer, culminating in the Incarnation and Passion of Christ, there is a sense in which what is believed has remained the same because its constant object has been the same providential God understood according to greater and greater precision. Before the coming of Christ, anyone who was inspired to believe in a providential God had implicit faith in Christ and so was saved. According to these terms, before the coming of Christ the salvation of non-Christians was unproblematic, and Aquinas seems to espouse an optimism with regard to salvation.

With the coming of Christ, however, implicit faith no longer suffices; all, both the learned and the simple, must explicitly believe in the mystery of Christ as the bodily and visible fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.[8] A presupposition of Aquinas's view is that the gospel has been preached to all people – Muslims, Jews, and pagans – in such a way that all have been given the opportunity to respond to God's offer of salvation in Christ. After all, it would not be fair to hold people to a requirement of explicit faith in Christ if through no fault of their own they had not been confronted with the gospel as a live option. In accord with this sense of justice, Aquinas asserts that if someone were to be born in an isolated situation apart from the Church, then God would provide him or her with a chance to believe, either through sending a preacher or giving a private revelation.[9] On the face of it, it seems as if Aquinas's teaching on the necessity of explicit faith in Christ for those born after the Incarnation results in an exclusivistic pessimism about salvation for non-Christians.

As George Sabra argues, however, Aquinas himself recognizes a distinction in the way the Gospel has been promulgated that allows for a more optimistic view of the salvific prospect of non-Christians.[10] When sorting through divergent patristic views of why the world had not come to an end as Jesus promised in Matthew 24:14, if indeed the Gospel has been preached to the whole world as Paul asserted in Romans 10:18, Aquinas tries to reconcile both Augustine and Chrysostom by asserting that in one sense the Gospel has reached to the end of the earth insofar as its fame or renown (*fama*) has reached everywhere. But in another sense it has not yet reached the ends of the earth insofar as its full effect (*cum pleno effectu*) has not spread everywhere; in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas identifies spreading with full effect with the establishment of the Church.[11] Aquinas usually makes no connection between the different ways in which the Gospel has been spread and the salvation of non-Christians. In commenting on Romans 10:18, however, Aquinas does argue that encountering the fame or renown of the Gospel and rejecting it is sufficient for culpable infidelity in the case of both Jews and Gentiles.[12] Yet if it is indeed the case that the mere fame of the gospel is enough to bring about a decisive salvific encounter, then does that not diminish the necessary role that Aquinas himself accords the Church as the sacramental embodiment of salvation? For this reason Sabra argues that Aquinas should have held that only those who have encountered the Gospel in its full effect, as embodied in the Church, can be held responsible for their failure to believe. Simply to have heard of

[8] See III Sent., d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, sol. 2.
[9] DV 14, 11, ad 1.
[10] Sabra, 161-169.
[11] ST I-II, 106, a. 4, ad 4.
[12] *In Rom.*, c. 10, l. 3.

the Gospel or even to have been preached the Gospel by an isolated missionary is not sufficient to constitute a decisive salvific encounter. In order for one to be guilty of the sin of infidelity, a person must have encountered the Gospel as embodied in a living and fully realized Church. For those who have not yet encountered the Gospel in the Church, the faith required for salvation would be the implicit kind required of pre-Christians.

Thus one popular move for Thomists is to reject Aquinas's claim that the Gospel has been efficaciously proclaimed everywhere such that a rejection of the Gospel constitutes a decisive encounter for one's salvation.[13] Given what we have come to understand about the relationship between religious faith and culture, it is no longer possible to hold that the refusal to accept the Gospel by a person raised in a non-Christian religious culture constitutes a decisive turning away from salvation. When the Gospel is not a live option because of cultural reasons, it is enough for an individual that he make a personal act of faith in a providential God. In this way the connection between salvation and an individual act of faith is maintained. Such an act of faith is implicitly in Christ in the way indicated earlier, and the grace that generates that act is ultimately from and through Christ. So according to this construal, all salvation comes through faith and through Christ, but the subjectively perceived content of faith may not be explicitly Christian. For J. H. Nicolas, it important to distinguish between the intentionality of the act of faith and its subjective content. All genuine acts of faith tend toward the reality of God as their object, but from the subjective point of view the awareness of the true reality of God may be more or less obscure. Yet while Nicolas argues that there may be a discrepancy between what is believed at the subjective level (the material object of faith) and what is actually motivating and specifying the act of faith (God as formal object), nevertheless there must be some logical connection between the two. In other words, for there to be implicit faith in God and Christ, it is necessary that the believer hold explicitly that God exists and that God is providential.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to find in the texts of Aquinas a more optimistic and inclusive approach to the problem of the salvation of non-Christians comes from Max Seckler.[14] Seckler asserts that Aquinas himself never clearly pulled together all the strands of his thought on the question, but he argues that there is an implicit solution in Aquinas's texts. Seckler agrees with the prevailing view that Aquinas's assertion that explicit faith in Christ is a requirement for salvation is no longer tenable because it rests on the erroneous assumption that the Gospel has been effectively proclaimed to all people. There are people after the coming of Christ who stand in the same relationship to him as pre-Christians because they have not effectively encountered the Gospel. Seckler argues that what is required to maintain the universal efficaciousness of Christ's passion and resurrection for salvation is not that everyone have explicit faith in Christ, but

[13] Another example of this strategy can be found in J. H. Nicolas, "Universalité de la médiation du Christ et salut de ceux qui ne connaissent pas le Christ," in *Atti del congresso internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario, Vol 4: Problemi di teologia* (Naples: Edizione domenicane italiane, 1974), 261-273.

[14] "Das Heil der Nichtevangelierten in Thomisticher Sicht," *Theologische Quartalshcrift* 140 (1960): 38-69. The doctrine is reiterated in his *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1961), 232-258.

rather that all faith ultimately comes from Christ. Saving faith is possible without having Christ as its explicit object; Aquinas himself acknowledges as much when he allows for Cornelius (Acts 10:5) to have implicit faith in Christ prior to a knowledge of the saving truth of the Gospel.[15]

What is distinctive about Seckler's approach is the desire to identify the faith necessary for salvation in a pre-conceptual instinctual movement of the human spirit towards God under the influence of grace. The faith that saves is not the assent to propositional formulae, but rather the first movement of human freedom toward God in conversion. Seckler wants to pry apart the connection between the conversion of the human spirit in faith as an inner instinctual movement under God's motion and the thick cognitive requirement that the objective content of what is assented to (the *enuntiabilia*) be clearly Christian or supernatural. Seckler argues that God's saving action works through the horizon of what can appear on the surface to be natural knowledge or natural activity. God is continually operative at the deepest levels of the human person bringing about conversion, and that action can be occurring even when it issues forth at the conscious level in a knowledge of God whose objective content is also derivable from natural reason (that God exists and that God is provident). There is a kind of primal revelation of God in the depths of the human spirit that comes from Christ, but is not explicitly centered on Christ such that it is not expressed propositionally in Christian form. In trying to articulate a more inclusive account of conversion and faith, Seckler blurs the traditional distinctions between natural knowledge and supernatural knowledge, between God's general activity in all creation (*motio divina*) and the working of grace, in ways that are troubling to other Thomists.[16]

Seckler's desire to locate grace and conversion more deeply within the horizon of the natural can be seen in his claim that conversion to God works through the human quest for value and meaning. In the search to discover and choose the true human good, the human person may be unconsciously born along by the action of grace in such a way that the choice of the authentic human good, the good in accord with human nature, may have salvific value in and of itself apart from any conscious choice of God as end, or even despite a conscious choice not to pursue what one (erroneously) understands by God as end. In this way, the pursuit of the goods disclosed by the natural law may be a religious act because under the influence of grace. The acknowledgment of the demands of a good outside of the self, and the recognition of the authority of conscience and a moral law, all involve an implicit awareness of a good transcending the self that is accepted and pursued in freedom. Seckler argues that the pursuit of such a good is implicitly under the grace of God, the ultimate source of goodness, even though at the subjective and

[15] "It must be noted that Cornelius was not an infidel; otherwise his action would not have been acceptable to God, whom no one can please without faith. He had implicit faith while as yet the truth of the Gospel had not been made known to him. Hence Peter was sent in order to instruct him fully in the faith." ST II-II, 10, 4, ad 3.

[16] See the review of *Instinkt und Glaubenswille* by Edward Schillebeeckx entitled "The Non-Conceptual Intellectual Element in the Act of Faith: A Reaction," in *Revelation and Theology*, Vol. 2, trans. N.D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 30-75.

conscious level there is no explicit act of faith or even any awareness of God as such.[17]

Seckler's analysis of moral striving as involving an implicit faith in God relies explicitly on an earlier attempt by Jacques Maritain along the same lines. In "The Immanent Dialectic of the First Act of Freedom,"[18] Maritain argues that an individual's moral conversion through a first act of freedom re-orientating his or her life can be tantamount to a religious conversion through an act of faith and so salvific, even when the conscious terms of the moral conversion make no explicit reference to God.[19] Maritain begins by stipulating that his focus is on "any *first* or *primal* free act, any free act through which a new basic direction is imposed upon my life."[20] It is the kind of act that reaches down to the foundations of the moral life because it concerns what one takes to be the ultimate good and it projects out into the future in the actions that will follow from it. It is an act that every person must make when he first becomes morally responsible, and it can be repeated when one undergoes moral conversion. Maritain argues that when one recognizes the demands of the moral good as a non-empirical value independent of the self to which the self must conform (recall the first principle of the natural law is "good is to be done"), one implicitly recognizes the existence of a transcendent good or God. In Maritain's own words:

> It [the law requiring that I do the good for its own sake] transcends the whole empirical order; the act that I bring into being must conform to it, if it is to be a good act; and the first precept of this law demands of me that my act be good. Such a law carries in the world of actual existence the requirements of an order that depends on a reality superior to everything and which is Goodness itself – good by virtue of its very being, not by virtue of conformity with anything distinct from itself. Such a law manifests the existence of a Separate Good transcending all empirical existence and subsisting *per se*, and subsists primarily in this separate Good. But how could I, in an act of total commitment, strive to achieve conformity with this transcendental law unless, by the same token and on a still more profound level, I strive toward this Separate Good and direct my life toward it because it is both *the* Good and *my* Good? The initial act which determines the direction of life and which – when it is good – chooses the good for the sake of the good, proceeds from a natural élan which is also, undividedly, an élan by which this very act tends all at once, beyond its immediate object, toward God as the separate Good in which the human person in the process of acting, whether he is aware of it or not, places his happiness and his end. Here we have an ordainment which is actual and formal, not virtual

[17] Another example of an approach allowing for moral activity to be unconsciously salvific can be found in the important ecclesiological writings of the Dominican theologian Yves Congar. For an overview of Congar's thoughts on salvation outside the church, see *The Ultimate Church and the Problem of Salvation*, James P. Theisen, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: St. John's University Press, 1976), 65-81.

[18] *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 66-85.

[19] Maritain's move is rooted in a certain tradition of Thomistic interpretation of a famous text of Aquinas in ST I-II, 89, 6. I consider this text in the context of the theological import of pre-Christian pagan virtue in "Aquinas on Pagan Virtue," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 553-557.

[20] Ibid., 66.

– but in merely lived act (*in actu exercito*), not in signified act – to God as ultimate end of human life.[21]

Maritain's rather compact argument seems to involve the following claims. First, a recognition of the demands of the moral good implies the existence of a supreme subsisting good that can be identified with God; just how an argument for this might go, however, is unfortunately unclear. Second, when I consciously commit myself to the moral law, I implicitly commit myself to the Supreme Good at some deeper and unconscious level. The reason for this is that my commitment to the moral good is an élan, a dynamic movement of the spirit, that surges past its conscious and immediate object toward God. Maritain asserts that this is truly a tending toward God (actual and formal), but at the lived level rather than the conscious level (signified). Maritain describes this knowledge of God as practical, non-conceptual, and vital. He also describes it as affective, connatural, and volitional because it depends not upon an intellectual grasp of its object, but rather upon the will's union with the object. Maritain goes on to argue that because this first act of freedom has God as its implicit object, it must be under the influence of grace because no human person can make God the end of life except by grace.[22] As under the influence of grace, it is thereby an act of faith with God as its implicit object. As an act of faith, however, the formality under which God is attained cannot be merely as ultimate Good, but must somehow involve the import of salvation. When God is sought as Savior, the knowledge in question can no longer be solely practical, but must also entail some kind of theoretical recognition. This knowledge is still non-conceptual, non-reflexive, and rooted in the will.

Because this kind of knowledge is below the threshold of reflective knowledge, it can co-exist with both a theoretical ignorance of God and even a theoretical denial of God. Maritain considers the case of a person raised as an atheist who must nonetheless deliberate about the ultimate moral good. Maritain distinguishes between pseudo-atheists and real atheists; the former are people who deny the existence of an imaginary entity that they confuse with God, while the latter deny the existence of the genuine God. Maritain wants to allow for the pseudo-atheist to attain an implicit faith in God if he or she is able to choose the true good in a moral conversion. While at the reflexive or conscious level the pseudo-atheist denies the existence of a pseudo-God, he or she is really implicitly striving toward the living God through the pursuit of the moral good in the first act of freedom. The real atheist, however, even if he or she appears to be moral on the surface, cannot be aiming at the genuine good because the genuine good implicitly includes a reference to the Supreme Good.

In conclusion, what has emerged from this consideration of positions is a progressive loosening of Aquinas's requirement of explicit faith in Christ for post-Incarnational salvation in favor of some kind of implicit faith in Christ. The first move in that direction was simply to apply Aquinas's pre-Christian criteria for implicit faith to the post-Incarnational era. At this first level there is still a claim that an explicit act of individual faith in God is necessary and that there is a

[21] Ibid., 69.
[22] ST I-II, 109, 3.

connection between faith's formal motive (we believe because of God's self-revelation) and the material object (what is believed) because some content is specified that must be believed: God exists and is provident. According to this reading, anyone who had an explicit religious faith in a provident God could be eligible for salvation. What we see emerging in Seckler and Maritain, however, is a move away from the requirement of conscious and explicit faith in God with some specified intellectual content, towards a pre-conscious, non-intellectual, volitional faith in God that has no neccessary connection to any intellectual beliefs regarding God. The advantage of this move is obvious: it brings almost anybody and everybody into the pool of those who are possibly on the way to salvation. But the disadvantages of this move are equally obvious. How can this pre-conscious, non-intellectual act be a genuine act of faith if the individual does not even know that he or she has made it? Maritain's account of this pre-reflective act is murky indeed and rests upon all kinds of problematic assumptions. If someone is going to claim that such an implicit act of faith is coherent and possible, then it would be necessary to do a lot more work laying the anthropological foundations for the possibility of such an act. Hence we turn to Karl Rahner.

## II. RAHNER AND THE ANONYMOUS CHRISTIAN

The transcendental Thomist theologian Karl Rahner has probably been the most influential voice within the Roman Catholic community on the question of the relationship between Christianity and other world religions since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Rahner's thought is governed by his acceptance of two fundamental Christian theological premises: (1) there is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ and (2) God wills the salvation of *all* people. Rahner is a self-described optimist about salvation, meaning that he interprets the second premise in the strongest terms possible and then inteprets the first premise in that light. If God actively wills the salvation of all people, then every person must encounter the free self-communication of God that is grace and so be given the opportunity in freedom to accept salvation. Since that grace and salvation come from faith in Christ, then every person must be confronted with the real possibility of belief in Christ. And not at one particular moment either, but throughout life. The option to accept God's self-communication in Christ must be an ever-present possibility for every person throughout their lives. The offer of grace is omnipresent and omnitemporal; it is an option at every moment and in every historical period. This means that God's offer cannot be exclusively connected to membership in the Church through baptism, since that has not always been a live option for everyone, and is still not a live option for many because of the culture in which they are born. Hence Rahner's task is to account for the possibility of a universal and omnipresent human encounter with God's self-communication in grace in such a way that that encounter is always somehow genuinely Christian even when it takes place within the context of another religion or even no religion at all. What enables Rahner to pull this off is his strategic distinction between the transcendental and the categorial levels of human existence: no matter what we consciously think at the level of the categorial, every human being necessarily encounters the self-communication of the God at the transcendental level. Those who at that level accept God, are ipso facto somehow Christian whether they know it or not; hence

the much-debated Rahnerian hypothesis of the "Anonymous Christian". In order to make sense of Rahner's characterization of non-Christian believers as implicitly Christian, it is necessary to say something about the background assumptions about human being and divine grace that govern Rahner's considerations.

*A. Hearer of the Word in a History of Grace*

Rahner's approach to the plurality of religions is premised upon the transcendental anthropology ingredient in *Hearer of the Word* and outlined in Chapter Seven.[23] Recalling that outline, Rahner thinks that a transcendental analysis of human knowing discloses that the human person is fundamentally an openness to the divine. Rahner bases this claim on the argument that our knowledge of any object as finite presupposes that we have some implicit awareness of the infinite as an *a priori* condition. In other words, we could not know that an object was finite unless we were implicitly judging it against the background of the infinite. This means that the intellect is always aware of a "more" or a surplus when it knows something as finite, and that this awareness is a kind of permanent backdrop to every act of consciousness. We are always aware of more than we thematize or register in any finite concept and in any act of judgment. Rahner describes this implicit awareness as the *Vorgriff* and identifies it with infinite being and God. So all our awareness of finite being takes place against the backdrop of the intellect's tendency to move beyond the finite to the Infinite and indeed to God. The intellect has a dynamic tendency to surge beyond the finite. It will be recalled that the *Vorgriff* does not imply that Infinite Being is grasped directly and immediately as an object prior to any act of cogntion, but rather that it must be postulated as an *a priori* transcendental condition of knowledge that is grasped in a non-conceptual fashion as lying at the edges and the end of all our knowing. Rahner argues that the same is also true of the will: every act of the will presupposes a dynamic tending towards the Infinite Good as what is required for us to recognize any finite good as finite. According to this analysis, human existence is marked by this transcendental openness to the Absolute in knowledge and love that is the abiding transcendental condition for all acts of consciousness.

Rahner goes on in *Hearer of the Word* to show that our *a priori* dynamic openness to the divine has a necessary orientation to history. Further transcendental reflection teaches us that God the ground of our created being is necessarily hidden from us because he is fundamentally free and transcendent. No amount of transcendental reflection on human experience can bring the mystery of God's being from latency to patency. We must therefore hope that God will choose to disclose himself to us by speaking a word. And the place where we must look for God's free self-disclosure is history, since we are essentially material, temporal, historical beings. It is the very essence of human being to be open to a possible revelation of God through a word in human history. We are authentically human when we acknowledge this truth and live as what we are: expectant hearers of the word. Moreover, since transcendental reflection discloses that the most expressive word would be a human being, because the human is the highest form of material

[23] The reader should refer to that discussion as the background for the present discussion.

and historical existence, we should look not just for a word from God but also for the Word of God.

What emerges from the transcendental analysis of the human condition is a perfect fit between human being and Christianity. This is not surprizing, however, when it is remembered that the transcendental method works its way back from a theological starting point to the *a priori* conditions. Given the premise that God has revealed himself and his purposes in Christ as the definitive bearer of salvation, what then must be true about the structures of human being so that we might be open to and apt for the reception of God's offer? Presuming that God's intention to communicate himself in grace and glory governed his creation of the human being as its final cause, it is reasonable to expect that the human person would be transcendentally hard-wired with an openness towards the Christian message. The whole purpose of the *a priori* method is to show how this is so.

A key premise in Rahner's understanding of how God has constituted the human person as an openness to grace is his idea of the supernatural existential. Rahner originally formulated this concept in the midst of the nature-grace controversy in the 1950's. His aim was to steer a middle course between the traditional Neoscholastic account of the nature-grace relationship, which he regarded as promoting extrinsecism because it too sharply separated the two domains, and the approach of *la nouvelle théologie*, which he regarded as erring in the opposite direction by blurring the necessary distinction between the two orders. Rahner's fundamental sympathies were with the latter group and he accepted their premise that God's grace should answer to the deepest capacities of the human being. If the end of human existence is to enter into a love relationship with God, then it must follow that our orderedness to that supernatural end is fundamentally constitutive of our existence:

> *Must* not what God decrees for man be *eo ipso* an interior ontological constituent of his concrete quiddity 'terminative', even if it is not a constituent of his 'nature'? For an ontology which grasps the truth that man's concrete quiddity depends utterly on God, is not his binding disposition *eo ipso* not just a juridical decree of God but precisely what man *is*, hence not just an imperative proceeding from God but man's most inward depths? If God gives creation and man above all a supernatural end and this end is first 'in intentione', then man (and the world) *is* by that very fact always and everywhere inwardly other in structure than he would be if he did not have this end, and hence other as well before he has reached this end partially (the grace which justifies) or wholly (the beatific vision).[24]

Because God has created human beings for a supernatural destiny, God therefore constitutes them with an openness, capacity, aptitude, and indeed a dynamism towards that end. This obediential potency to divine Love is the center and root of human existence. It is a universal feature of every person that permeates and pervades all of human existence and activity. Borrowing from his teacher Martin

[24] "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 302-3.

Heidegger, Rahner describes this openness to the divine as an existential (*existenzial*) of human being. What this term is meant to highlight is that openness to God is not a contingent or chosen mode of being human, but rather a fundamental, constitutive, *a priori* determination of human being: "The capacity for the God of self-bestowing, personal love is the central and abiding existential of man as he really is."[25] As an existential feature of human being, it is universally present even in those who freely deny or repudiate God; it is prior to the free acceptance of grace as its precondition.

But while the capacity for God is an existential of human *being*, it is not an existential of human *nature*. The inner directedness of human being to grace cannot be a feature of human nature because then the supernatural would lose its character as unmerited grace and instead be something due or owed by God to human nature. It is precisely this point that differentiated Rahner from *la nouvelle théologie* (and Aquinas): the inner dynamism of human being toward God cannot be a feature of human nature but rather must itself be supernatural. Rahner agrees with *la nouvelle théologie* that if God wills a supernatural end for man then he must also give him a positive and dynamic orientation to that end, but he rejects the claim that the disposition in question is natural: "the longing for, the ordination to, God's love, this existential for supernatural grace, only allows grace to be unexacted grace when it is itself unexacted, and at the moment when, fulfilled by grace, it becomes conscious of itself *as* supernatural, i.e. shines forth as unexacted by the real man, not owed him."[26] The supernatural existential is thus the freely bestowed universal capacity of human being to share in the divine life that is the precondition for any conscious and freely willed relationship to God. As Rahner specifies, the recognition of the supernatural existential precisely as supernatural is the gift of grace. Prior to the human being's acceptance of grace, the existential is experienced as simply the openness to transcendence that is an *a priori* feature of human being.

It is an important part of Rahner's position that not only do we have an openness to grace because of the supernatural existential, but also that grace itself is always and everywhere offered by God to the creature that he has especially constituted for that purpose:

> The supernatural grace of faith and justification offered by God to men does not need to be conceived of as an isolated intervention on God's part at a particular point in a world which is itself profane. On the contrary it can perfectly well be interpreted on the basis of God's universal will to save as a grace which, as offered (!), is a constantly present existential of the creature endowed with spiritual faculties and of the world in general, which orientates these to the immediacy of God as their final end, though of course in saying this the question still remains wholly open of whether an individual freely gives himself to, or alternatively rejects, this existential which constitutes the innermost dynamism of his being and its history, an existential which is and remains continually present. God's universal will to save objectifies itself in that

[25] Ibid., 312.
[26] Ibid., 313.

> communication of himself which we call grace. It does this effectively at all times and in all places in the form of the offering and the enabling power of acting in a way that leads to salvation.[27]

All of human striving towards transcendence takes place within the horizon of grace. All of human history is then a history of grace and revelation because of God's ever-present offer of self-comunication and self-disclosure to human beings.

God's offer of grace necessarily addresses the human being at both the transcendental and the categorial or historical levels. God's radical saving nearness in grace is always a mediated immediacy; that is, our encounter with divine transcendence is always mediated through the categorial-historical. Just as there is no direct encounter with the Infinite at the level of knowledge but rather only a co-presence as transcendental horizon to individual acts of knowledge, so there is no direct religious encounter with God at the transcendental level that is not mediated by the historical: "This orientation of the spiritual dynamism of man towards the immediacy of God, which is both known and unknown, is, it is true, in order to be known at all (which does not mean reflected upon as an object or capable of being adequately reflected upon by the individual) mediated through the realities of this world assignable to 'this worldly' categories."[28] Now obviously Rahner holds that the privileged, definitive, and absolute categorial mediation of grace is found in the life of the Church. But Rahner argues that there is no necessary connection between explicitly Christian categorial mediation of the divine and the transcendental experience of the divine. This is really the key claim in Rahner's account of the plurality of religions: it is possible to experience God in a genuinely Christian way at the transcendental level even when the historical-categorial mediation of that encounter is non-Christian and even anti-Christian.

*B. Anonymous Christians and Non-Christian Religions*

In one of Rahner's earliest treatments of the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions, he sets forth four theses which govern his subsequent treatments of the question and form a convenient heading for understanding his approach.[29] The first is that while Christianity is the absolute and definitive religion for all people, it is an open question as to when it becomes the form of religion absolutely binding for all people. Christianity only becomes binding for a person when that person is able to encounter it in its full urgency and vigor. It is not enough simply to hear the Christian message proclaimed in order to be bound to accept it as the true religion. Rahner allows for both subjective and objective factors to mitigate an individual's encounter with the gospel such that that encounter may not be binding. Someone born into another religious culture, for example, may be so deeply shaped by that culture that he or she cannot accept the gospel at a conscious level; also, the very presentation of the gospel in a non-

[27] "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 14, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 288.

[28] Ibid., 289.

[29] "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 115-134.

Christian culture may lack full force and vigor. In such a situation, an individual's rejection of the gospel may not be culpable.

Rahner's second thesis is that until the gospel enters with its full force into the life of an individual, a non-Christian religion may be an authentic mediation of the supernatural grace of God that comes through Christ. To deny this would be to deny the universal salvific will of God. Rahner states:

> . . .the actual religions of "pre-Christian" humanity too must not be regarded as simply illegitimate from the very start, but must be seen as quite capable of having a positive significance. This statement must naturally be taken in a very different sense which we cannot examine here for the very different religions. This means that the different religions will be able to lay claim to being lawful religions only in very different senses and in very different degrees. . . . A lawful religion means here an institutional religion whose "use" by man at a certain period can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is positively included in God's plan of salvation.[30]

When it is recalled that "pre-Christian" man for Rahner is anyone at any time and any place for whom the gospel has not yet become a live and binding option, Rahner's general thesis is that it is *a priori* possible and indeed likely (given God's universal saving will) that there are genuine supernatural mediations of God in non-Christian religions. Non-Christian religions need not be free from corruption, error, and objective moral wrong in order to be authentically salvific, as the history of Old Testament religion makes clear.

Human religious experience is necessarily mediated by the social structures in which a person is born and inculturated. Religion is by definition a social and communal practice. When we recall the necessary mediation of the transcendental by the categorial, then it is clear that it is impossible to think that someone could have an unmediated transcendental experience of God independently of his categorial religious practice:

> As already stated above, the inherence of the individual exercise of religion in a social religious order is one of the essential traits of true religion as it exists in practice. Hence, if one were to expect of someone who lives outside the Christian religion that he should have exercised his genuine, saving relationship to God absolutely outside the religion which society offered him, then such a conception would turn religion into something intangibly interior, into something which is always and everywhere performed only indirectly, a merely transcendental religion without anything which can become tangible in categories.[31]

Since every man is pursued by grace within the concrete historical order in which he finds himself, a man outside Christianity is pursued by grace through the

[30] Ibid., 125.
[31] Ibid., 129.

mediation of the religion in which he finds himself and "must have had the right and indeed the duty to live this his relationship to God within the religious and social realities offered to him in his particular historical situation."[32]

Thus far Rahner's account of non-Christian religions looks pluralistic in character. But it is with a third and controversial thesis that his distinctive version of inclusivism comes into focus: all those who are in a graced relationship with God within the context of another religion are nevertheless implicitly or anonymously Christian.[33] This follows from the preceding thesis together with the theological premise that Christ is the one true mediator of salvation such that faith in him is the necessary means to salvation. If non-Christian religions are genuinely salvific, but all salvation comes through Christ, then non-Christian religions are genuinely salvific because and through faith in Christ. It is important to note that Rahner's argument is entirely *a priori*; that is, it does not rest on any empirical claims showing explicitly Christian elements in other religions' doctrines or in the consciousnesses of their adherents. Rahner's claims about non-Christian adherents being anonymously or unconsciously Christian is the only way that Rahner can see to correlate his optimistic view of God's salvific will with the central Christian claim about faith in Christ as the necessary means of salvation.

Now the obvious problem for Rahner is to give a credible account of how someone who consciously adheres to another religion, even one which explicitly denies the truth of Christian claims, can nonetheless be meaningfully described as a Christian despite himself. Rahner's solution to this problem lies in the distinction between the transcendental level and the categorial level. Even though the two are intimately related such that there is no transcendental awareness apart from categorial mediation, nonetheless Rahner's schema tries to pry them apart enough to allow for a discrepancy between what is true at the transcendental level and what is mediated and objectified at the categorial level. As Rahner himself puts it in a rather dense passage:

> Now how can we conceive of this possibility of faith in the "pagan"? In attempting – nothing more than an attempt is intended – to answer this question some anthropological insights may surely be taken as given which should be explained and established more fully elsewhere: the difference and unity between objective knowledge and that which is known on the one hand, and a non-objective, non-thematic awareness and the reality thus known on the other – in other words between "this worldly" knowledge and transcendental knowledge, between that which is expressed in conceptual form and the further levels of significance not consciously adverted to of a given statement, between the material object and an *a priori* formal object concomitantly present with the capacity to know, between the object of knowledge and the further perspectives

[32] Ibid., 131.

[33] See "Anonymous Christians" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 390-398 and especially "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 14, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 280-294.

> of knowledge – or whatever name we choose to apply to the distinction we are seeking to draw. . . .[34]

Whatever categories we use, Rahner's anthropology calls for a distinction between a transcendental awareness of the divine that is non-conceptual and non-objective, and a conscious categorial knowledge of God that is conceptually expressed. Now clearly the latter cannot be expressive of the former since no categorial formulation can be adequate to the transcendental experience of the Holy Mystery of God. But Rahner's thesis is still stronger. Since he believes that all transcendental experience of God is Christian, he has to hold that that transcendental experience is often mistakenly described and expressed in the non-Christian categories which mediate it. Non-Christian religions mediate an encounter in grace at the transcendental level with the God of Jesus Christ that is subsequently expressed within the categorial framework of the religion which mediated the encounter. Such a person is completely unaware that the transcendental experience is Christian since it is mediated and objectified within another religious framework. What this means is that Christian transcendental experience is not tied to Christian religious mediation or objectification. Any religious framework can mediate the transcendental Christian experience, although it will subsequently conceptually falsify it in a non-culpable way at the categorial level.[35]

Rahner's claim about the possible disconnect between the transcendental and the categorial even allows for the possibility that someone could be consciously and categorially atheist while transcendentally and implicitly Christian.[36] In this case, even secular realites function as a mediation of the divine. Rahner's argument begins with the premise that not every case of atheism is culpable and blameworthy. Atheism has become so prevalent in modern society that a person can be born and inculturated into it as if it were a form of religion. At the conscious categorial level, such a person rejects religion and the existence of God. But at the transcendental level, where the atheist bears a transformed consciousness courtesy of the supernatural existential and encounters God's offer of himself in grace, it is possible that the atheist assents in faith to God despite his denial at the categorial level. Rahner's argument for this possibility envisions the case of a morally conscientious atheist, and argues that anyone who freely accepts the demands of conscience thereby implicitly assents in faith to God: "The person who accepts a moral demand from his conscience as *absolutely* valid for him and embraces it as such in a free act of affirmation – no matter how unreflected – asserts the absolute

[34] "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" 287.

[35] Rahner describes the presence of Christ in non-Christian religions as coming about through His Spirit: "This Spirit is always, everywhere, and from the outset the entelechy, the determining principle, of the history of revelation and salvation . . . Since the universal efficacy of the Spirit is directed from the very beginning to the zenith of its historical mediation, which is the Christ event (or in other words the final cause of the mediation of the Spirit to the world), it can be truly said that this Spirit is everywhere and from the very beginning the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine Logos." "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 17, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 46. On the basis of the presence of the Spirit, transcendental consciousness has a *memoria* pointing it towards the absolute bringer of salvation.

[36] "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 9, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 145-164.

being of God, whether he knows or conceptualizes it or not, as the very reason why there can be such a thing as an *absolute moral demand at all*."[37] Rahner's argument here seems to be that anyone who accepts something *a posteriori* that implies some *a priori* condition is implicitly committed to the latter as well. But that does not seem to be enough to ground a claim that the atheist has freely chosen God at the transcendental level. For, as Rahner acknowledges, what transpires at the transcendental level has to be somehow an act of *faith* if it is to be truly justifying. Rahner replies that an atheist has a transcendental disposition that is akin to faith because it has an inherent dynamism towards faith: "There can exist an 'anonymous faith' which carries with it an intrinsic dynamism and therefore an obligation to find full realisation in explicit faith, but which is nonetheless sufficient for salvation even if a man does not achieve this fulfillment during his lifetime, as long as he is not to blame for this."[38] Rahner describes this anonymous faith variously as a free acceptance of unlimited transcendence, or responsibility for self-determination, or an acceptance of conscience. His identification of those acts with the act of faith rests on the prior claim that human consciousness has been radically transformed by elevating grace through the supernatural existential and so bears upon God as its ultimate end. Hence the acceptance of one's self-transcendence in freedom and moral responsibility is a graced act with God as its source and goal, even if the subject is unaware of this horizon of grace. To accept the demands of conscience is to recognize that the self is not the arbiter of value, and so to recognize that something transcending the self is more basic as the source of value. Thus the free recognition and acceptance of one's self as beholden to conscience is an implicit recognition of God and an act of faith:

> If a person by a free act in which he accepts himself unconditionally in his radical reference to God raised up by grace, also accepts the basic finality of this movement of his spirit, even if without reflection, then he is making a genuine act of faith, for this finality already means revelation. If this supernatural finality is freely accepted, without explicit reflection, then there exists what we term 'anonymous faith'.[39]

It is at this point in Rahner's analysis that the gap between the transcendental and the categorial is at its greatest because (1) his position requires that there is no necessary connection between transcendental Christian experience and any form of categorial mediation, and (2) it requires that a person could be completely unconscious at the categorial level (denying God) of what he is freely accepting at the transcendental level. Whether or not someone has accepted grace at the transcendental level is something that "cannot be settled by pure introspection."[40] Someone can be categorially atheist and transcendentally Christian and vice-versa.

This interpretation of the possible transcendental status of implicit or anonymous Christians has obvious ramifications for the meaning of membership in

[37] Ibid., 153.

[38] "Anonymous and Explicit Faith," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 16, trans. David Morland, O.S.B. (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 52-59.

[39] Ibid., 58.

[40] Ibid., 57.

the Church and for its missionary activity. In Rahner's fourth basic thesis he asserts:

> It is possibly too much to hope, on the one hand, that the religious pluralism which exists in the concrete situation of Christians will disappear in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, it is nevertheless absolutely permissable for the Christian himself to interpret this non-Christianity as Christianity of an anonymous kind which he does always still go out to meet as a missionary, seeing it as a world which is to be brought to explicit consciousness of what already belongs to it as a divine offer or already pertains to it also over and above this as a divine gift of grace accepted unreflectedly and implicitly. If both these statements are true, then the Church will not so much regard herself today as the exclusive community of those who have a claim to salvation but rather as the historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially consitituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church.[41]

Evangelization and missionary activity are not obviated by the doctrine of anonymous Christians, but rather take on a new goal: instead of aiming at the conversion of non-believers, it is really an effort to bring anonymous Christians to the truth about their transcendental identity. What the transcendental theist really needs is a kind of *mystagogy*. Once the anonymous theist recognizes his or her deepest identity, he or she will then seek explicit membership in the Church as providing both the true expression of his or her faith and the authentic mediation of grace.

Rahner's inclusivism has been the focal point of debate on religious pluralism within the Roman Catholic community and he has been criticized from several angles.[42] How can non-Christian religions with mutually contradictory doctrines and practices all be ways of salvation? Does not Rahner's position diminish the centrality of Christ to salvation? From a non-Catholic point of view, Rahner has been criticized by George Lindbeck[43] for offering an experiential-expressivist approach to religion wherein all religions are interpreted as the objectification of some common depth experience (often unregistered at the conscious level) that is subsequently expressed in a conceptual form. Lindbeck argues that such approaches are unable to identify coherently the alleged core experience because it is objectified and mediated by so many diverse means. Moreover, Lindbeck argues also that such approaches fail to do justice to the way in which religious experience depends upon the cultural-linguistic framework of a religion to explain its specific character (the primacy of the external over the internal).

Much more could be said by way of critique of Rahner, but given the nature of this volume what is most important here is to note where other Thomists see fundamental problems. As noted earlier in the book, some Thomists simply reject the validity of the transcendental method outright. Leaving those complaints aside

[41] "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," 133.

[42] An overview can be found in Sullivan, 175-178.

[43] See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Philadephia: The Westminister Press, 1984).

here, what emerges as the most problematic element in Rahner's account is the relationship between the transcendental and the categorial. In Rahner's account of their relationship, it is possible to have a contradiction between them. At the conscious level one could be a militantly anti-Christian atheist, while at the transcendental level being in a faith relationship to the God of Jesus Christ (and vice-versa). As noted, this requires making transcendental consciousness mysteriously opaque to conscious reflection or introspection. Rahner appears to think that we never really know what is true about ourselves at the transcendental level. Yet if this is so, how can we significantly be free? How can this transcendental self-determination vis-à-vis God be a free and responsible act if I am unaware of it at the conscious level? Rahner makes transcendental self-determination so mysteriously out of the reach of categorial moral intention that it is hard to see it as free or indeed to make sense of it at all.

As we have seen, Rahner also dissociates transcendental *a priori* consciousness from any necessary connection to specifically Christian categorial mediation. One of the ways he describes this dissociation is in terms of the Thomistic distinction between the formal object of faith and the material object of faith. In essence, what Rahner is saying is that there is no intrinsic connection between the two. For other Thomists, however, this is a highly problematic move.

## III. PROVIDENTIAL DIVERSITY AND PROSPECTIVE AFFILIATION

Joseph A. DiNoia's critique of Rahner's doctrine of implicit faith relies upon both the traditional assertion of a logical connection between what is implicit and explicit and a more contemporary appreciation of the nature of religion. DiNoia argues that "the notion of implicit faith designates in part the unrealized capacity to exhibit in full the doctrines of the Christian community, and in part the reasonable disposition to accept on the word of trustworthy or official authorities what is the full account of the doctrines of this community."[44] Moreover, it must be remembered that faith of any kind is not just an intellectual assent to a body of doctrines, "but also the determination to give one's entire life a certain course in accordance with the pattern of life fostered by the Christian community and sustained by its common life and worship."[45] According to the traditional view, someone within the Christian community is considered to have implicit faith on the basis of some explicit commitment to the articles of faith based on a personal trust in God, an explicit commitment to the pattern of life taught by the community in view of the ultimate end of beatific unity with the Trinity, and a trust in the authoritative teaching office of the Church to make explicit what the individual cannot. In Rahnerian theology, the traditional notion is extended to include non-Christians by eliminating these criteria. In the absence of these criteria, however, it is hard to see how the phenomenon Rahner wants to designate by the traditional term of implicit faith can be legitimately so described.

DiNoia's basic complaint against Rahner's extended notion of implicit faith is that it attenuates the traditional notion so much that it no longer serves any genuine explanatory function: "[Implicit faith] loses its explanatory efficacy when there is

[44] "Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians," *The Thomist* 47 (1983), 233.
[45] Ibid., 223-224.

no straightforward and convincing way to link what is said to be implicitly held with an explicit body of beliefs, practices and valuations."[46] Unless we can identify some specific content in the beliefs of non-Christians that is congruent with specific doctrines of Christianity, we should no longer speak of implicit Christian faith in non-Christian religions. DiNoia also argues that Rahner's account implies the rather imperialistic claim that adherents of other religions cannot give an adequate account of their own religious dispositions; according to Rahner, ultimately only a Christian characterization of religious dispositions is fully accurate. According to DiNoia, however, any genuine *dialogue* with non-Christians should begin instead with the presumption that they are fully capable of providing correct internal descriptions of their own religious aims, and that those aims may not converge with what Christians understand by salvation. DiNoia goes on to argue that the assertion that non-Christians can achieve salvation through implicit faith involves attributing to them a success or achievement that is unrelated to any intentional activity on their part: "The incongruity in this formulation is that someone is said to be on the way to succeeding in something he intends to do ("attaining salvation") only by doing something he does not intend to do ("implicitly believing")."[47] It is surely odd to attribute to an individual an achievement that is unconnected to any intentional activity and that may even be at odds with what is actually intended in the person's life.

As noted in the previous section, Rahner's concept of implicit faith is dependent upon a theory of general transcendental revelation. As DiNoia points out, however, Rahner's understanding of revelation inverts the traditional relationship between the primary and secondary uses of the term. In traditional Thomism, the primary use is to define the content of the doctrines to which faith assents (*credere Deum*), the specific description under which the content is regarded in faith (*credere Deo*), and the aim of life proposed by faith (*credere in Deum*). It is only in a secondary or extended usage that revelation can be employed to describe the origin of truth found in other religions. In Rahner, however, the two usages get reversed. Revelation comes to refer primarily not to a content of doctrines, but to a transcendental experience disconnected from specifically Christian doctrines and practices. At this level, a potentially limitless set of objects of knowledge and volition can be regarded as having God as their formal object because there is no necessary connection to intentional activities with some kind of specifically Christian content. It is only the secondary or extended usage of revelation in Rahner that refers to explicitly Christian categorial revelation. Thus by defining revelation primarily in terms of a transcendental religious experience that can be mediated and symbolized in an infinite variety of ways, Rahner has moved away from the traditional doctrine of revelation with its primary connection to what has been revealed in the categorial history of salvation. For DiNoia, this reconstrual of revelation involves an unattractive and untenable devaluation of the traditional primary sense.

If Rahner's doctrine of implicit faith is not tenable, however, then the obvious problem emerges as to how to ascribe some salvific value to the patterns of life led

[46] Ibid., 227.
[47] Ibid., 226-7.

by non-Christians. If Rahner's form of inclusivism is incompatible with Thomistic doctrines on faith and revelation, then is the only viable alternative a return to exclusivism? Yet the apparent exclusivist-inclusivist dilemma begs an important question: should non-Christian religions be evaluated by Christians as if they offered alternative paths to what Christians understand by salvation? As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Roman Catholic consideration of non-Christian religions has traditionally been driven by the assumption that since Christ is the only way to salvation, the sole way of ascribing a positive value to non-Christian religions is to construe them as somehow implicitly committed to the path of Christian salvation. What is novel about DiNoia's approach is his willingness to jettison that a priori presumption. DiNoia argues that we should instead take non-Christian religions at their own word regarding their internal aims, such that we are open to the possibility that what they propose as the end of life is something quite different from Christian salvation. If that is the case, however, then obviously some way other than hidden present affiliation with Christians through implicit faith must be found to allow for the prospect that non-Christians can eventually reach salvation. This project is the aim of DiNoia's *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective.*[48]

DiNoia's approach presupposes that diverse religions offer diverse interpretations about the true end of human existence and thus commend diverse patterns of life. There is a necessary connection between what a religion holds as the true aim of life and the pattern of life that it commends to its adherents. Religious communities commend patterns of life which include valuations, courses of action, beliefs, and dispositions precisely because it is believed that these will orientate and prepare the adherent for the enjoyment of the ultimate aim of human life. If there is this kind of connection between patterns of life and ultimate ends, and if there is genuine diversity of life patterns and ends among diverse religions, then it is no longer possible to assume that non-Christians have some kind of implicit Christian faith. For how could someone whose whole life pattern is shaped by another end thereby arrive at the end which structures the Christian life? How could a Buddhist, whose entire way of life is shaped by the aim of attaining Nirvana, somehow thereby arrive instead at Christian salvation? How could a person immersed in the life-long practices of one community shaped by its distinctive aim, thereby arrive unwittingly at an end proposed by another community that enjoins a different pattern of life as the means to its version of the ultimate end?

DiNoia's approach stresses the need to have a Christian theology of religions that recognizes the distinctive doctrinal claims of other religions. Earliest Christian reflection on other religions did have a kind of doctrinal specificity because Christianity was in direct competition with other religions. But once Christianity became the dominant religion, its reflection on other religions tended to become less doctrinally specific and more a priori. In the contemporary arena, both inclusivists and pluralists do not take seriously enough the genuine diversity of other religious communities because they assume an a priori soteriocentrism which distorts their views of the doctrines of non-Christian religions. Inclusivists tend to

[48] (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

sublate the doctrines of other religious communities into the Christian scheme. Pluralists, on the other hands, tend to homogenize all religions in the direction of an indeterminate salvific goal reached by a wide variety of patterns of life. DiNoia argues that pluralism is actually a radical revisionist position, since it purports to replace the internal accounts of all religions with an alternative external account of what they are "really" about. Pluralists think that since no religion knows what the true end of life is and each employs an inadequate conceptual schema, the true end of life never actually functions to shape the life patterns of any religious community. What is ultimately common to both pluralism and inclusivism is that they attenuate the connection between aims of life and patterns of life in ways that do not do justice to the self-understanding of the religions they purport to interpret.

While the genuine diversity of aims and practices among non-Christian religions makes it inappropriate to ascribe specifically Christian salvific value to them, this does not mean that the Christian must revert to an exclusivistic negative judgment upon them. Rather, the Christian ought to affirm in faith that other religions have some unknown providential role in God's plan. Since that role cannot be considered salvific in specifically Christian terms, it is not appropriate to consider them as presently in some sort of hidden affiliation with Christians through implicit faith. If non-Christians are to be saved through Christ, as must be maintained in accord with Christian doctrines regarding the unique and universal salvific function of Christ, then it can only be through some future or prospective relationship to Christ. What is unusual about DiNoia's approach is the appeal to the doctrine of purgatory as providing the opportunity for a post-mortem salvific encounter with Christ.[49] Purgatory "allows for an interval (which may be thought of as instantaneous and coterminous with death) the essential feature of which is the experience of a necessary purification or transformation in view of the assured prospect of eternal bliss."[50] Since purgatory does not offer the opportunity to reverse fundamental life decisions made prior to death, this implies that non-Christians in purgatory will come to realize the ways in which their religious lives had been an implicit *praeparatio evangelica*. Somehow non-Christians will come to see both the continuities and the discontinuities between what they practiced and believed in their own religions, and what is indeed the truth about the ultimate aim of life as union with the blessed Trinity through Christ. How this is so, of course, is impossible for us to specify. It is at this point that perhaps the central problem in DiNoia's approach comes to light: it would seem that either purgatory involves the possibility of a fundamental life change, which is not allowed for in the traditional doctrine of purgatory as a place of final purification for those already justified in Christ, or what will happen in purgatory is that non-Christians will come to realize that they were somehow already on the path to Christian salvation. In other words, it is hard to see how DiNoia's approach can work without either substantially altering the traditional doctrine of purgatory to allow for the prospect of a final

[49] Gavin D'Costa thinks that this makes DiNoia an exclusivist since DiNoia holds that ultimately salvation requires explicit confession in Christ. See his review of DiNoia's book in *The Thomist* 57 (1993): 524-528. DiNoia, however, thinks that while he strives to go beyond the exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist paradigm, there are nonetheless some affinities with inclusivism in his position because he holds that God's grace is operative in non-Christian religions.

[50] *The Diversity of Religions*, 105.

conversion or implicitly ascribing to non-Christian religions some kind of soteriological value. DiNoia does not want to do either of these, but he also cannot specify how this dilemma is resolved.

DiNoia argues finally that a theology of religions that respects religious diversity will lead to a renewed appreciation for the role of philosophical theology in inter-religious dialogue. Since Christians will no longer presume to re-interpret non-Christian religions along Christian lines, they will have to locate their own claims on a non-religious, philosophical conceptual map as a precondition for dialogue. Christians and non-Christians alike will all have to explain the bearings of their doctrines on the full range of human life, knowledge, and experience through philosophical categories. The central philosophical task in this regard will be to formulate arguments introducing the ultimate referent of religious discourse into non-religious logical play, and then to show what can be said about the ultimate object of worship within the framework opened up by the referential argument. DiNoia argues that the traditional arguments for the existence of God should be seen as functioning primarily to locate God on the conceptual map of human experience rather than as serving an apologetical or foundational function. DiNoia implies that Thomism is particularly well suited to the kind of dialogue with non-Christian religions envisioned by his approach, since it has both a highly developed set of arguments for the existence of God and a sophisticated account of religious predication.

In conclusion, it should be clear by now that there is no resolution to the problem of religious pluralism that is not without its problems because any resolution involves stretching traditional categories in problematic ways. The tension between the claims that there is no salvation apart from Christ and that God wants all people to be saved is deep indeed. Perhaps the best we can do in the end is what DiNoia advises: trust that God will figure out a way of resolving what we cannot.

# Conclusion

The vitality of the Thomist tradition depends continuously on the original genius of its founder. Thomas Aquinas's intellectual achievement constitutes arguably the most powerful and comprehensive theistic worldview ever articulated by one person. As *sacra doctrina*, Aquinas's theological project aims at providing a unified view of the whole of reality as coming from and ordered to God, the Origin and End, the Alpha and Omega. At the service of that theological vision, Aquinas developed a comprehensive philosophy unified by a metaphysical vision according primacy to the act of *esse* (to-be) as foundational to all being. It is precisely this theistic, sapiential, and metaphysical unity that makes Aquinas's thought perennially attractive to philosophers of religion. It has been one of the major aims of this volume to introduce the reader to the thought of Aquinas as it is relevant to central topics in the contemporary philosophy of religion. Hence each chapter in this book contains an account of how Aquinas himself handled the questions most closely related to the topic at issue.

As powerful as Aquinas's original synthesis is, however, it should not be treated as if it were a complete set of timeless and ready-made answers to all questions in the philosophy of religion. So while the root and fount of Thomism will always be an historically sensitive and holistic reading of the texts of Aquinas, its ongoing vitality as an intellectual tradition demands that it continually re-think the insights of Aquinas in the light of the contemporary problematic and in dialogue with other intellectual traditions. As Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, it is of the very nature of Thomism as a living intellectual tradition that it aim at the *telos* of a perfected form of enquiry through a series of progressive reformulations of the original achievement.[1] Just as Aquinas himself creatively took up the threads of the Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions to fashion a new synthesis in the light of his own contemporary problematic, so must contemporary Thomists take up the thread of Aquinas and the preceding tradition to do the same. As a result of different contexts, problematics, interlocutors, and intellectual bents, twentieth-century Thomists have pushed the tradition in varying directions. Thus the Thomist tradition is not monolithic, and the other major aim of this volume has been to

[1] *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), see especially 58-81.

display the differing ways in which the thought of Aquinas has been developed in the domains that now go under the rubric of the philosophy of religion. It is meant to serve as a resource both for those who will extend the tradition further from the inside and for those who would wish to understand it from out of the traditions represented in the other volumes of this *Handbook*. The emergence of the philosophy of religion as a major discipline within mainstream philosophy at the end of the twentieth-century provides exciting prospects for Thomism in the twenty-first century. The very same features that once worked against its serious consideration by philosophers of other persuasions – its theocentric and metaphysical unity – now make Thomism attractive to those interested in the philosophy of religion. What newcomers to Thomism discover therein is a rich and long tradition of discussion on issues with a comparatively short contemporary history elsewhere. Indeed, Thomists have literally been arguing for centuries about most of the topics considered in this volume, and the legacy of those discussions provides an invaluable resource for contemporary philosophers of religion. It is hoped that this volume can serve to make the contemporary practice of the philosophy of religion more historically informed and broad-based. The intellectual traditions originating from the great medieval thinkers have much to offer contemporary philosophers of religion; there are deep and underexplored affinities between the intellectual aims of the great medieval thinkers, their resulting traditions, and contemporary philosophy of religion.

At the same time that the Thomist tradition can enrich the contemporary practice of the philosophy of religion, it also can benefit from deeper engagement with philosophers interested in common questions operating out of other traditions. Thomism has labored too long in something of a Catholic ghetto, wherein other philosophical traditions were considered to be largely hostile to or dismissive of the central concerns of the tradition. With the emergence of the philosophy of religion as a recognized discipline in non-Catholic philosophy, the Thomist tradition now confronts a changed landscape with the promise of a more sympathetic hearing. In order to make their claims accessible and persuasive to those outside the tradition, however, Thomists will have to learn how to articulate and justify their positions in new ways in the face of objections that come from different idioms and backgrounds. Such a challenge should be welcomed by Thomists, for it will inspire fresh formulations and new insights into traditional claims. To dodge the task of justification would make Thomism unfaithful to the spirit of its founder, who thought through an objector's point so seriously that he was reputed to be able to formulate it even more sharply and so take it as the occasion to develop his own position more rigorously. As noted at the end of the first chapter, the encounter between Thomism and analytical philosophy has emerged as a particularly fertile area of exchange in the contemporary philosophy of religion. It is one of the purposes of this *Handbook* as a whole to encourage such exchanges between traditions, and it is hoped that this volume will enhance that endeavor not only with respect to analytic philosophy, but also with the other represented traditions.

In addition to the challenge to sharpen and re-articulate the claims that it already makes, Thomism's engagement with other traditions within the contemporary problematic raises some new questions for which there are no ready-made answers

within the texts of Aquinas or the tradition itself. While many of the topics treated in this volume have a rich history within the tradition, others are relatively underdeveloped. With respect to the relationship between religion and science and the problem of the plurality of religions, for example, there is still much more work to be done by Thomists. Rather than thinking of Thomism as a closed system with all major questions answered, a fuller engagement with contemporary debates can help Thomism develop the tradition in new directions in the light of new questions.

Thomas Aquinas died before he completed his grand synthesis in the *Summa theologiae*. While it is surely regrettable that he did not leave us a completed whole, nevertheless, as an old Dominican once imparted to me, there is something fitting about the incompleteness of the work. It stands as a reminder that the task of thinking through the whole from the godly point of view is not one that can be definitively completed in a single lifetime. It is something that we do in dependence upon those who have gone before us in the tradition and in hope upon those who will come afterwards. This volume is an endeavor to acknowledge the achievement of the past tradition in all its richness, but it also represents my own contemporary appropriation. It is not meant to be a final word on any topic for Thomists or non-Thomists, but rather as a starting point for the reader in his or her own appropriation of the Thomistic tradition in the philosophy of religion. Whatever the tradition, anyone who undertakes the study of the deep questions at issue in this series knows that they do not admit of definitive answers on this side of the veil. Nonetheless, we count whatever insight into the truth that we do attain as well worth the effort. For as Aquinas learned from Aristotle, "even the slightest knowledge that can be had of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain cognition of lower things."[2]

[2] ST I 1, 5 ad 1.

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[1] I would like to thank Rev. Matthew Rzeczkowski, O.P. for compiling this index and for helping me in proof-reading the manuscript. The references are to names mentioned in the text, not the notes.

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